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BLACK GOLD



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TORONTO

BLACK GOLD

BY

L. ELWYN ELLIOTT

Author of "Brazil: Today and Tomorrow"



New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1920

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Set up and electrotyped. Published October, 1920

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MACMILLAN
COMPANY
NEW YORK

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I

WHEN Margarita came out of the little railway station and turned to the left where a long ribbon of sandy road climbed the hill the light was already fading.

No passenger but herself had alighted from the London train: no other living things were in sight but Bob, the carrier from Sansoe, slowly gathering together the packages flung from the guards' van, and his old piebald horse, that imperturbable servitor, very close kin to Bob himself. When she came back, if she came back, from this rather mad adventure to Brazil, she would find them here just the same, jogging along the moorland roads, she said to herself. The cart passed her at the bottom of the hill, but she smiled and shook her head when Bob offered her a lift; she wanted to think, to have a little time to get her story ready, to render her fantastic proposition clear-cut, before she launched it into the middle of her family. Casual as they were, you couldn't expect them to swallow the Amazon, as it were, without a gulp. The matter would need a trifle of tact.

Surmounting the rise with the easy swing of the country-bred, she kept her eyes upon the haunted wood just below the crest, not consciously seeing it, but soothed by its dark, withdrawn greenness. The sharp tang of October fought with the vanishing warmth of a brilliant day: the acid-

sweet scent of heather and bracken hung in the air. When she reached the top of the hill, abreast of the wood's last trees, she checked her steps for a moment, looking down upon the little gorge below with its stream a rosy thread caught up into the sea, itself an opal mirror, and the pale road that left Sansoe below, and rose to twist away to Tregarwith.

Beyond the bridge over the little river, a few hundred yards after the road began to run upwards again sharply, a path diverged from it almost at right angles, skirting the rise and seeking the sea. Following this line, the girl's eyes encountered a big square house, its back to but-tressing granite, set in a nest of sheltered trees, but with a hardy face turned to wind and weather. As she looked, lights began to appear in the windows and streamed from the porch; the door was open for her.

She still stood without moving, looking at the house and valley and sea and moors, as if they suddenly presented themselves from some new viewpoint; the long lines of dipping heather-clad moorland were red-purple in the dying light, a haze already creeping up from the sea to their margins. The whole bold outline of the country was bared to the sky and the eternal winds, the granite frame only lightly covered with the close mantle of grass and heather, ling and gorse; woods there were, but these crouched in hollows in the mass of purple heights and shoulders, sheltering from salt air and beating storms. Last she looked at straggling Sansoe, a double line of sturdy stone cottages set along the banks of the river in their slip of a haven. But Margarita saw the village not as a haven but as a starting point for great adventures. In the deep and narrow inlet lay three

or four fishing boats, rocking gently, their slim masts high above the cottage roofs, frail impudent craft waiting their chance for sea harvests.

She walked on presently, but saw no road. Before her eyes was the dark, stuffily upholstered waiting room in the station in London, its coal fire blazing, a fat woman knitting silently in the corner, and Francina standing in front of the mirror, staring at her own pretty face, and talking about Brazil. Wherever there was an accessible looking-glass, Francina was always sure to be in front of it; Francina with her powder puff, her borrowed furs, the hole in her stocking, her gay laugh and lovely eyes, waving her little hands and insisting upon far lands and diamonds. Outside, the chilly mist of London, entering now and again when somebody opened the door, had seemed like a caustic intrusion upon Francina—that bewitching sister with such a reserve of rocky common sense behind all her carelessness and frivolities, and with such deep crevasses of irresponsibility scored in that same rock.

In what other way could you account for Francina's romantic error of marrying at eighteen, and marrying, of all people, Salvatore, with nothing in all the world but his handsome Italian face, his nearly first-class tenor voice, and his world-wide experience of second-rate, hand-to-mouth opera companies? It had been Francina's major departure from the serene bee line of personal advantage that she had followed since childhood; she had always been completely absorbed in her own personality, a vain little peacock accustomed to perennial spoiling, and accepting tributes to her fair, angelic beauty with unstirred calm.

Margarita, three years younger and of a much less sensational beauty, had never dreamed of

criticizing the adored Francie, but now, thinking upon the scene she had left, she felt herself again thrilled, almost terrified, by the revelation of a passionate purpose.

"I want something out of life!" Francina's voice had said, lowered for the sake of the knitter in the corner. "And for you, too, darlingest child, of course!" as a hurried afterthought. "I will make the world give me what I want! Look at me and you—aren't we strong and pretty, human beings *worth* something? How are we going to get it? Think of father, down there in Cornwall with his books—*oh!*" She had powdered her little white neck angrily. "When I think of it that there are ropes and ropes of pearls, and bushels and bushels of diamonds in this world, and mountains of glorious furs and lace, and I haven't a scrap of any of them! And all of them mined and hunted for and made lovely for women like me. I mean to have them! Margarita, do you know something I've found out? The only thing it's worth while for a woman to be, is to be a woman."

When they had gone out into the street again, so that Margarita could see Francie into the tube before taking her own train, Francie had stood still on the edge of the pavement to cry out with indignation: "Oh, do look at that terrible old woman! With her Chow and her pearls, in that big green car! Oh, what a crime! Look at her, nearly rolling out of her cushions with fat and laziness, and two rows of pearls round her atrocious neck! Pearls! When I get them I shall wear them all the time. I shall sleep in them. . . . And her furs! Margie, what a lot of happiness men miss, don't they, not adoring clothes! I wonder what they think about instead? Us, I suppose."

Waving good-by to her sister, she had turned back for a final shot, delivered with dancing eyes: "Salvatore says that the last opera company that went to the Amazon came back with such tons of money that they all bought villas in the Riviera, except the girls who stayed there and married rubber millionaires—don't laugh, darling!"

"Well, *you've* got Salvatore," Margarita had reminded her, and she had responded a trifle absently: "Oh, yes! The precious dear, of course," and vanished in the crowd.

Margarita had not been affected by the vision of pearls by the pailful, but her heart leaped at the thought of strange tropic lands, of wild sun-drenched forests, of great skies with new stars shining in their velvet depths, of far waters and foreign voices. In the rather queer house of her upbringing she had seen from her babyhood a procession of visitors pass constantly, men who talked lightly of Persia and Samoa, Java and Greenland. How many times she had stood, worshipping and curious, before the huge hyacinthine macaw, the evil-tempered bird that had fought the cat and, alas! died of the victory. Burying him with tears, she had buried an enchanted messenger from wonderful far countries; perhaps, she said now, still regretfully thinking of him, he had come down that very mighty Amazon up whose waters she soon might go.

By the time she reached the house she had in mind already traversed foreign lands, and was returning like one of those eager-talking, hollow-eyed men who came to this out-of-the-way spot to see her father. She turned in at the driveway, looking at the daisy trees with the eyes of a stranger; their stems and leaves were dim in the twilight, but their little faces were as bright as

new stars. Faced with the native granite of the moors, the house was a solid structure, given grace by the thick shrubbery about it and the loveliness of the scene; standing upon a natural ledge based upon and backed by an outcropping of stone, it looked to the sea, but on the sheltered side a veranda ran along its flank, with a flagged terrace and pillars twined with hardy roses and clamatis. From this point you looked across the valley beyond the rolling moors until higher hills barred the sky.

From the great porch door streamed the leaping light of a log fire, and as she went in, unwinding a blue scarf from her throat, shouts greeted her. Gypsy and Brooke, long-legged children, knelt toasting bread before the fire, and her stepmother, sitting composed and cheerful at her round tea table, gave her the large smile that was an unfailing part of her stepmotherly equipment. A pleasant, stoutish, gray-haired woman, the second Mrs. Channing, with very blue eyes and red wind-whipped cheeks. She had a slight affection of the right eye, a quick occasional movement that gave her an air of humorous twinkling, of having a secret joke with you. Francina always said that Channing père had married her on this account. "He thought she winked at him, and you know father's always ready to take a sporting chance." She had been a widow of the neighborhood, and, childless herself, had acquired the family with complaisance, even enthusiasm. A great stickler for non-intrusion, she declined to tread anywhere near the privileges of the lovely dead mother, and refused to be called anything but Aunt Kitty. The two younger children had been quite small things when she accepted Arthur Channing's invitation, and it was she who had placed photographs of

their mother over their beds, taken them regularly to her grave, and taught them to keep half a dozen anniversaries.

She did not question Margarita about her hasty trip to town, at Francina's rather incoherent telegraphed behest three days before. "Far be it from me to catechize Arthur Channing's girls," was her attitude. But she looked upon the slim young creature before her with affection that may not have been unmixed with curiosity, twinkling kindly at the glowing face, flushed with moor wind. Brooke and Gypsy were not so discreet; they rained questions on their sister.

"What did Francie want? When is she coming down? Did you get that fishing tackle? Did Salvatore say anything about his motor boat?"

"Francina sent her love to everybody," said the girl. And, looking across at her stepmother, added a little breathlessly: "She is coming down by the eight o'clock train to-night—with Salvatore, and they're bringing a friend. A friend from Brazil."

"That's delightful, dear; we'll put off dinner till half-past eight," said the lady, ringing the bell to give her necessary calm orders, and ignoring the rejoicing war whoops of her stepchildren. "Do have some tea, you must be cold."

Margarita took her cup, sat down on a low stool, and accepted a piece of rather burnt toast from Brooke's gallant hands. Brooke, going on for ten, thin and restless, hawk-nosed, had nothing of the grace of his three sisters, for Gypsy, a year older, repeated the lovely lines and coloring of the two elder girls. Dark-haired and lustrous-eyed, a secret child, with no other comrade than her inseparable Brooke, she was a boy in his company, and a silent shadow in his absence. No one knew better than these two the crannies of all the

smugglers' caves for a dozen miles up and down the coast; they swam and fished and rowed, galloped on their shaggy ponies all over the countryside, conspired and quarreled, and let nobody into their lives. Only one awful grief hung over them, one black threat: the not very distant day when Brooke must go away "to some really good school where he'll get well thrashed," as his father remarked now and again, when some special devilment of the two came to his ken.

With the bottom of her cup facing her, Margarita took courage; she approached her unlikely tale obliquely. "Aunt Kitty, Salvatore's bringing his friend—his name's Ware—to tell you and father about Brazil. You see, Salvatore's getting up a—Salvatore's very much interested——" she stopped.

"Very interesting indeed," said her stepmother obligingly. It was at this not too lucid moment that Arthur Channing, a book open in his hands and another under his arm, strolled into the hall. Margarita, well aware that he had forgotten that she had been away from home, rose and kissed him, looking at him with a mixture of relief and indulgence. Channing was not so much of a dreamer as a man so deeply immersed in the particular studies that attracted him that he had little violent emotion left for the usual concerns of life. He had, no doubt, passionately loved the beautiful Portuguese girl he had brought home to England after one of his periods of travel, but it had been the only stirring emotion of his life. His attitude to his family of handsome and lively children was that of one gentleman to another. Incapable of making money, and fortunately blessed with an inherited house and a small income, he pursued his path, much liked and admired by men,

regarded with some suspicion by women—impermeable as he was to smiles—and a very good friend to almost anyone. Casual, tolerant, his keen mind was always fixed on the solution of something which had nothing to do with living persons.

He stooped very little for a man who spent much time among books; he had retained an affection for the outdoor life to which his children were also inclined, and had taught them to be good watermen and walkers, to know plants and stones and stars. He was, at this time, still engaged in the scientific studies whose elaboration brought him fame, if no other reward. He had bright gray eyes, hair that had been fair and was now gray, and a well-trimmed pointed beard. As soon as he had taken his tea and muffin to the padded fender stool, Margarita came to his side, and remarked in an offhand manner: "Oh, father, Salvatore wants Francie and me to go to Brazil with an opera company his partner's arranging. And he's coming down to-night to tell you and Aunt Kitty about it. Isn't it lucky Francie and I can sing? And won't it be useful, our knowing some Portuguese?"

"Excellent idea," said Arthur Channing. "Another lump of sugar, please, Kitty."

"We're going up the Amazon, father, to a place that's just bursting with money, and Salvatore's going to make his fortune at last."

If the young woman still watched her father's face with any feeling of insecurity her mind was soon at ease.

"A most interesting journey," he agreed cordially. "If I hadn't got this Central African treatise to finish, I should think about going with you, and over the Andes into Peru. There is something above Iquitos that I have always wanted to look

into. Perhaps you could come back that way; you might have time for some very useful investigations."

At this moment Mrs. Channing permitted herself to speak; her rosy face had taken on a much deeper tint. "I have always heard that that is a most unhealthy region. . . . Of course, my dear, you will do as you please! But I think that some inquiries——"

Margarita hastily recalled scraps of her lesson. "Oh, not now, Aunt Kitty! There isn't any yellow fever any more! Truly, Salvatore says so! His friend's been living there four years, and he's all right. He's got a sister-in-law staying at Helston with her children, and he's going to see her, and Salvatore and Francie got him to come here with them on the way."

"In fact, he is to act as Exhibit A of Amazonian salubrity," remarked Arthur Channing. "How did they induce him to come here to display his rude health?"

"He didn't want to, but Francie made him. I didn't see him, but she says he is an awfully good sort. . . . I think he is going on the same boat to Pará with us. Father, I'll bring you back a snake skin forty feet long," the girl promised, avoiding the eye of Aunt Kitty.

"Very good of you, Margie." He was a little absent-minded, a considering light in his eye. "I'll tell you what you really might do for me, if you get the chance. Two things, in fact. I should much like a complete series of the rocky pictures on the upper Rio Negro, and I wish you would go to Obidos and make inquiries about the carved stone pieces that Verissimo says he found there. Make a note of it, will you? You might try to get

hold of some other specimens. I'll give you a new camera if you'll try to get photographs, even if you can't get the things themselves."

She agreed cheerfully, and presently escaped to her room, where the ancient brown nurse who had come years ago with Arthur Channing's pretty bride from Lisbon followed her, to turn up the flame of the big oil lamp—no gas or electric light had yet arrived at Sansoe—and to adjust the blinds, hang up the discarded clothes, and generally to hover about her *senhorita*. Margarita regretted the habit of the house that had forced Nair to learn English instead of obliging the children to acquire more than the few colloquial phrases of Portuguese which were all that the young Channings possessed. She sat on the bed and let the old woman take off her shoes.

"At least my ears are able to *hear* Portuguese," she said to herself, and out loud she asked: "Will you come with me if I go with Francina on a long, long journey across the sea, Nair?" She got nothing but a deepening of the thousand wrinkles on the old woman's face, that meant an indulgent smile for these *tontarias*, gave it up, and remained, her arms on the footrail of the bed, musing. She laughed aloud as she thought again of her father—that had been easy, at least! "If I told father that I was going to the North Pole next week, he would say it was a good idea, and then he'd ask me to try out a new kind of electric ice sledge, or to bring him back a white bear's left toe-nail or something," she decided, and then stayed, dreaming of wide sunny spaces and a great river with a forest full of flowers down to its lapping edge until voices below reminded her that it was eight o'clock, the train in, and her sister already

arrived. She dressed hurriedly, slipping into a pale green summer muslin that made her look like a wood nymph, and ran downstairs.

On the landing where two broad stairways met, ascending from right and left of the hall's end, she stopped for a moment, looking down. By the fire stood Francina, her face irradiated in the glow of the flames, the borrowed furs still gracing her pretty shoulders; she was talking gaily to the group before her—her stepmother in her inevitable black velvet evening dress, her father and Salvatore. Salvatore's arm was about his mother-in-law's waist, and a burst of laughter came up the stairs as Margarita stood poised. Beside Salvatore stood a third man, rather tall and slender, in a careless attitude, a hand in a pocket; the light struck upon a singularly fair, well-brushed head. This, then, must be John Ware.

At that moment, as if aware of scrutiny, the stranger stirred, moved out of the group away from the fire, turned and glanced up the staircase. For a second Margarita looked straight into clear, cool eyes before he drew back and she moved down into the hall.

During dinner and the hours of talk that followed, Salvatore expounded his plans. Financed in the first instance by a group of wealthy men from Brazil ("Pará, and some place away up the river with a hard name—*Man-ay-os*—no, *Man-owse*, that's how you pronounce it") he had been invited with his partner to take an opera company to the Amazon. "I've got two thousand pounds in the bank this minute. They're bursting with money, and they've no recreations, you understand me, except playing dice and drinking rum or whatever it is." To somebody's interjected

remark about "a nice kind of environment," Salvatore had loudly protested: "Certainly they are nice! They're just lonely! Anybody'd do that sort of thing if they were left alone in some backwoods in the tropics."

He had to go to Italy to get a chorus together—"though I could get just as real and good-looking Italians in New York, off Washington Square, and not so ridiculously unsophisticated, if I had the time to go across and get them. It's looks and level heads, as well as voices, that I want."

"Dear Salvie can never forget his happy youth in the purleius of New York," Francina had remarked.

"Their second cable said we needn't bother about voices so much as pretty faces," he went on rashly. "I daresay the Amazon would be just as well pleased if the chorus heads were empty, but if I am going to take a company all that way I mean to present some operas, and no nonsense. Why, the last company that went there——" Meeting stares, Salvatore hastily switched from boggy ground.

Three incidents of the evening remained impressed upon the memory of Margarita. The first occurred when her father, developing a warm enthusiasm for the Amazonian trip, suggested that Brooke might be taken in the party. "He seems to have a natural bent for geology, and the need for commercial geologists is just beginning to be recognized. If you could find somebody who would take him over the Andes, you see, it would develop the boy and do him a lot of good." Mrs. Channing here made her protest against the dismemberment of her acquired family.

"I certainly didn't marry Arthur Channing in

order to be left alone in the house with him," she declared smilingly but emphatically, a remark that was accepted as perfectly reasonable by Arthur Channing himself. She had turned to Salvatore, always a great favorite of hers in spite of the fact that he had committed the crime of taking one of her beloved Channing children from her, and said quietly to him: "It was bad enough for Francie to marry you, my dear boy, without your going to the ends of the earth with Margarita too. . . . The greatest comfort I have ever had in my life, the only piece of real luck, was marrying a man with a ready-made family. I only wish there had been eight of them instead of four. I should so much have liked some little ones."

It struck the silent Margarita, sitting by Salvatore's side, that this sedate and persistent affection of Aunt Kitty's, so much taken for granted, was a dreadfully pathetic thing; she averted her head, to hear the stranger giving a smiling account of himself, in reply to some question of her father's. No, he didn't find the tropics unhealthy, except that one got a touch of malaria now and again; but that wasn't any worse than a bad cold in the head in northern climates. People should not stay too long in one place. . . . Oh, yes, he had been in other tropical regions—Ceylon and the Straits Settlements, he said, and then, perhaps feeling that he had an appearance of reserve, rather briefly explained a little further:

"My father had a tea plantation in Ceylon, a very jolly place as I remember it as a small boy. But when I was seven or so they sent me home to school, and I didn't go back until I was over twenty. Then I made a two years' journey all about Malaysia, Borneo and Java, and Sarawak,

and so on, before I took up work on my father's place." [He stopped.]

"Wasn't tea rather badly hit?"

"Yes, if modern methods weren't used to keep the plantations on a producing level with India. But the trouble was that many of the older easy-going planters didn't do that, and then let their places run down when they ceased to pay, instead of speeding them up." Again, with what seemed like an effort, he made up his mind to courteous explanation, and after a few seconds went on.

"My father was so cut up about things that he died, eight years or so ago, with the estate so deep in debt that I had to sell the house and part of the estate in order to keep the rest. I shouldn't like to give it all up—it is in a ripping situation, in the hill and valley region south of Haputale."

"Hard luck."

He disowned claims to sympathy. "Lots of men were worse hit. The only thing is, I have a widowed sister-in-law who is a good deal of an invalid, and she finds a cold climate trying. She is always hoping to go back to Ceylon."

"But if you are on the Amazon now?"

"Well, you see, I kept half our estate—and we have it planted with something else. Rubber, in fact. And that takes six or seven years to come into condition for tapping. So meanwhile I thought I might as well be doing something else. A young cousin of mine is out there on the Cingalese place. A very good chap, looking after things. The place paid its way with catch crops of bananas and pineapples this year."

The entry of the sweets making a trifling diversion at this moment, the guest stopped again, and it was under cover of Francina's argument with

her father as to whether she would or would not personally test the bite of the piranha ("Dearest father, my legs are precious to me, if not to you") that Margarita turned to her neighbor:

"You didn't say why you went to the Amazon, though."

He gave her a quick, peculiar look, almost startled, almost defensive, before he answered with apparent frankness:

"Naturally I am interested in rubber, as I have a small plantation, and the Amazon is its native home, of course. The eastern plantations are alien immigrants."

Channing heard this and remarked: "Yes, it's like the transportation of the coffee industry to Brazil, in her southern states, isn't it? Transferences of whole industries . . . there must be an enormous difference in Ceylon?"

"All the difference between any highly organized industry and one which is hardly more than the work of independent amateurs. I don't mean the marketing part—there the whole world's organized. But the actual base. . . . On one hand you have great dense forests, pierced only by rivers, unhealthy, with the rubber trees in the proportion, often, of one to fifty other kinds of trees. The laborers don't work for wages, and are practically their own masters, except that they are always deep in debt to the middleman who fitted them out; they work solitary, often fall sick and die without anyone knowing about it, in their huts in the forest. And then in contrast we have huge plantations closely planted with the one tree; organized bands of hired men working under constant supervision; scientific methods in preparation of the gum for the markets. Nothing is left to chance."

"It doesn't seem as if the Amazon could survive in competition . . ."

"Yes, because after all it does produce the best rubber." He said this with a final air and turned to Mrs. Channing with a question about Cornish cream—a subject that always lighted the spark of battle in her eye. But Margarita, whose interest in rubber was confined to ink erasers and wading boots and waterproofs, retained within her memory, nevertheless, the curious look that the stranger had given her when she asked her idle question.

The third impression was made by Francina, who came to her sister's room after good nights had been said, radiant, delighted that possible family objections to the fantastic enterprise had been so easily vanquished. She took a candle and held it below the picture of their mother, regarding the exquisite face with intense interest. "Ah, our angel mother!" she cried to Margarita, facile tears in here eyes. "How much more beautiful she was than either you or me, and yet—if she had only had my head! You must be very careful about your future, Margie! To have beauty and no discrimination—what a disaster! I often think that lovely women ought to be immured in convents between the ages of six and twenty, and either taught nothing at all, and their future arranged for them by some clever uncle, or else drilled into understanding that beauty is the only thing in the world that can get everything it wants, if it knows how."

She closed her lips and stood brooding for a minute; then kissed Margarita hastily and went away.

II

DIRECTLY after a hurried and early lunch next day, Margarita went to the little room off the hall where the Channing family kept an assortment of cricket bats, tennis rackets, fishing rods and other tackle, oars, sou'westers, leggings, sticks, and outdoor clothes. She took a light sweater, pulled a tam-o'-shanter over her head, whistled to her too-fat terrier, and went out by a door opening on to the terrace. Climbing the low stone wall, she crossed the bare rose garden and set her face to the moor. It was an afternoon as warm as high summer, the country flooded with golden light, soft billows and pearly clouds massed like mountains on the horizon. As she emerged on to the road she came face to face with John Ware.

"Are you going for a walk? May I come with you?"

For a moment she was inclined to say no; she wanted to be alone, to escape for a little while from all this endless discussion, to spend a few hours with her beloved moors before she had to part with them. And this was a stranger. But looking into his face she found some quality that subtracted strangeness, melted her defense; she liked his rather long, fair face, his close-lipped, clear-eyed quietude, his air of ironical cool sweetness. Here was something serene and kind, secure and comradely. She smiled at him: "I am going a long way, and perhaps in your tropics you have forgotten how to walk."

"Perhaps. But try me." He turned to her side and they walked in silence for a minute.

"I'll tell you what I thought of doing," she told him presently, as they reached the highway. "The moors near here are not high enough for me to-day; I wanted to get up into the wind. I thought I'd take the two-ten train and get off at a little place I know at the foot of those hills—over there—and climb to the top of a favorite tor of mine. Would you really like to come?"

He would.

The coming train was already whistling as they crossed the Sansoe stream, and they had to walk fast up the opposite slope toward the little railway station, only slowing down as they walked on to the gravelled platform. "You are not panting! I don't believe you are badly out of training; we did that half mile in eight minutes," she informed him, and he took license from her scrutiny to take rapid stock of her in turn.

"She's a bewitching girl, almost beautiful," he decided. "She has a delicious little proud head, and a real air of race. I like her slimness and transparent skin. Those long gray-blue eyes are charming, and what exquisite eyebrows! And the way her hair grows thick on her forehead and on her golden neck . . . an elusive creature, somehow, too."

She walked like a boy, taking long steps in her short serge skirt, her hands in the pockets of her blue sweater. She belonged out of doors, he said to himself; she was a different and more radiant being than when she was in the house, her ranging eyes and light voice confined to the limits of four walls. In the train he said to her: "I don't know your haunted country. I have only seen it once

before, two or three years ago. I spent nearly all my English years in Surrey, and then in Cambridge, and a year in the Liverpool tropical school, you know. But I love Surrey and all heather countries; it's the elixir of life to me."

"How do you know it's haunted?"

"It has the air of it. The breeze seems to blow from some remote land, some enchanted place of the winds; and then, the long flowing lines of purple moorland, veiling their horizons in mists, always seem as if they might lead to some strange end that you can't guess. The stones, too; haven't you got any stone circles or avenues about here? I should always be afraid of offending the old gods if I trod near them."

She shook her head. "Oh, no! That's only because you don't know them. So long as you are respectful, and love them, it's all right. And the moor—it's a kind of cousin of mine, I think. I'm very friendly with it. I have grown up with it . . . here we are."

Leaving the line of railway, they walked inland, following a sandy road deeply rutted in the middle; upon the margins little heather bushes grew thickly, with the deeper-hued bells of ling between them, like an amethyst carpet. Here and there were darker patches of gorse that, when close at hand, displayed sweet-scented, bright yellow flowers set among the mass of prickles.

The road descended sharply and then began to soar upwards, following the crest of a long spur. Soft winds came in gusts blowing sweet over the empty moors; the sky was a pearly blue bowl, and pale sunlight lay in floods upon the wide sheets of purple. Nothing broke the long lines but the heads of the distant tors.

After walking for an hour on the upper moorland, upon roads that were little more than sheep tracks, they clambered up among tumbled rocks, slippery with wet moss, to the top of Tregennen Tor. This, topping the long rise, was a fantastic pile of huge stones, slabs, apparently heaped one upon the other by some whimsical giant. Sitting down to rest for a few moments, the climbers looked down upon a sea of purple. Margarita, pushing away her wheezing terrier, took tenderly from her pocket the little collection of plants for which she had left the path now and again as they ascended. She spread them upon her lap and showed Ware gravely the bright rosette of sundew, its transparent crimson fingers tipped with crystal drops; the white flags of bog cotton, hung upon frail wire stems; a belated spray of whortleberries.

"A queer thing about these moors is that sometimes the higher you get the marshier it is," she told him. "I think it's because the clouds swing so low, and soak into the ground for half the year . . ."

He meditated, perhaps in a rather sentimental mood. "If it wasn't for the memory of moors and marshes and woods in spring, one couldn't live in the tropics. I can shut my eyes any day in Manáos and feel my feet on thick grass, and smell roses. It doesn't matter to you so much, because you are only going for a few months' adventure, and if you are homesick you can pack up and come back. But I have to just soak all this into me."

"Why do you stay in the tropics?"

"To finish something I have begun. To succeed. And partly, too, to make some money. Of course, I could live at home on a few hundreds a year,

but there's my sister-in-law and her kiddies to consider."

"You could probably make some money in London or Manchester if that was all you wanted."

"Oh, no! Cities like that would be impossible. Much worse than the Amazon. Bricks and pavements and black coats. Much worse! There at least is something wild and unenslaved, to balance the commercial struggle. That exists: you fight for money there just the same as in London or Hamburg or Chicago. But it's at least not tame, not confined. . . . English moors and woods must have sent hundreds of thousands of men into the jungle and desert and arctic ice fields! You can't bear cities if you have once loved trees. Isn't it strange how in a little island like this there's so much wild nature, and one lives so near the soil? You'll realize this some day, if you have to live in some new commercial country where cities are all planked down upon some dull and roadless plain and there are no roads outside, no movement except by train."

She gave him a beautiful smile. "Yes, perhaps. Now, what shall we do next? You have to catch the train at seven-thirty, haven't you? It's about half-past three now. There's lots of time; we can't get a train back to Sansoe until nearly six. Let's see if we can find a farm where they'd make tea for us. I think there's a little farmhouse down in that fold, over the road and down the combe, on the other side, where the trees are thick; you can't see it from here. I haven't ever been there, but I often go down the valley on this side to something that there is—it's a secret, but I'll tell you if you'll promise never to let any guidebook person know. It's a stone circle that isn't on the maps.

It's a very low one, and the stones are all deep in bracken and heather. Will you come and make obeisance to my gods?"

"I think I'd better keep at a safe distance. I tell you what we'd better do. I'll take you down and leave you to your incantations, and I'll go on to the farm and coerce them into tea."

"All right. I daresay there's a fierce farmer's wife who would need coaxing. And there is certain to be a dog who would fight my poor old Nero. Get him tied up, won't you?"

"It would do Nero good to fight now and again," declared the rash young man, but quailed beneath the eye of the maiden. Descending the hillside, they crossed the road at its foot and saw from it the deep valley below, half in shadow, a sweet and secret nook, the precipitous sides clothed in glowing purple and yellow and brown; a little stream shone in its depths, blue where the sun was mirrored in it, dark brown where fern and blackberries drooped over it, lace-white where it raced at and over the stones that lay in its path. At the farther end of the gorge, and on the other side of the brook, slept a little wood—no, it must be an orchard. There was a certain orderliness in the arrangement of the trees, and a glint of color that suggested apples. Between their ranks appeared the gray roof of a little house, and as Ware looked, fixing the location in his mind before beginning the descent among these deep and trackless masses of thick heather and fern, he traced the green line of the hedge, the gleam of a white gate. He saw, drifting blue against the dark trees, a thin wisp of smoke.

They followed at first a narrow track that seemed to lead direct to the brook below, soon

lost it, and plunged deep into heather bushes, tall rust-brown bracken that stood shoulder high, and scraped their clothes on the golden gorse. They waded in a sea of sturdy moorland bushes, avoiding only the bright light-green spots that meant bog.

When they were about two-thirds of the way down, the ground less steep, Margarita stopped. "There is my stone circle!" And showed her companion a block of hewn granite, a few yards to her left, set deep in honey-scented ling, and adorned with orange-hued lichens. She pointed out the tops of other stones in the neighborhood: "Now I am going to evoke my ancient gods, and ask them to see me safe into the hands of your South American deities," she cried. "But I am awfully thirsty—do go and use your blandishments upon the farm lady!"

"You can follow me in ten minutes, and if they have got a teapot, it shall be steaming for you," he promised her.

"If! All our Cornish girls are ruining their complexions with tea all day long, like the Irish! Father says they'd better drink potheen," she informed him.

Ware, leaving her, reached an open grassy slope immediately before the brook, but found that the water was deeper than he had imagined, running swift and clear over a stony bed, and too wide to jump across at this point. But looking towards the farmhouse he saw that a line of stepping-stones crossed the water at a point opposite the thick orchard, and so made his way towards them through the denser bushes by the margin. Encountering a patch of small thorny trees that needed careful negotiation, he went out of his way to

avoid the worst part of the thicket; when he had passed it, and had come back to the water, the close-set trees of the little orchard were directly before him, just across the stream that here was wider and shallower, dancing with a musical sound among the stones strewn in its channel.

After all, the stepping-stones had scarcely been arranged; they were but loosely scattered about the shallower part of the water, and Ware criticized for a moment the farmer's lack of care for his family's comfort as he picked a precarious way to the farther bank, and raised his eyes to the house.

At once he said to himself that he must have curiously mistaken the direction while approaching, for here was no orchard, but a small wild wood of dwarf oaks and thorns. The farmhouse must lie beyond them. Or perhaps wood and garden were mated in common shelter. He skirted the dense trees, looking between them for the house.

There, running down to the brook, was the green hedge and the gate surely? But near at hand the hedge resolved itself into nothing but clumps of gorse and briars—and was it possible that this stone had appeared like a wicket? And that there really was none? Oh, no! He had seen it! The house must lie behind the next group of trees . . . but it did not. Walking along the edge of the brook that the garden had seemed to meet, he saw his orchard dissolve into clumps of small oaks, his cottage into a twisted pile of gray rocks. Nothing else was there. He came out at the farther border of the wood, astounded but still obstinate, and, climbing upon a steep point of granite that projected near by, peered as closely as he could into the trees.

As he looked, his eyes caught the vanishing trail of a wisp of smoke and he heard a little, sharp sound—like the wail of a very young baby; the house was there, then! In the very heart of the wood. Locating as precisely as he could the spot where it must stand, he plunged right into the trees. But as he entered them they seemed to divide, to spread out thinly, so that the sunlight struck through every part of them; the woods disintegrated, sparse and open, the trees interspersed with big tumbled blocks of moss-grown stone. He climbed all about the spot, searching it, going down to the water's edge and hunting among the willow-herbs and tall reeds and meadowsweet, trying to find some sign; a footprint or the flutter of a fleeing petticoat would have satisfied him. For even after he had had to admit that the curious juxtaposition of bushes and stones had deceived him—and misled, too, the moor-wise Margarita—that they had created an illusion, he still could not rid himself of the feeling that the place was, or had recently been, inhabited.

It was warm with humanity; this was no raw and desolate spot. It had the breathing spirit of an inhabited region. In contrast to the wild loneliness of the moor, where sky and land met in an endless ring of solitude, this spot was instinct with the intimate kindliness of a home. He strained his ears for the inevitable sounds that some conspiracy of the moor kept from him; the silence had a suspended stealth. Once or twice he was sure that he heard whispering and a hushed laugh from behind a bush.

He beat the wood thoroughly before he gave up his idea. Then, recrossing the stepping-stones, he made his way back along the bank, and met Margarita by the thicket.

"Well, they haven't got a teapot," he said, watching her face warily.

"Haven't got a teapot!" she stared at him, with, he decided, quite new and genuine surprise. She went on: "I saw you walking in the garden—weren't you speaking to some one there?"

It was his turn to stare. "Are you sure you could see the garden—and the house? Do you know just where it stands?"

Still surprised, she replied at once: "Of course! I can walk straight to the front door." She hurried to the edge of the stream, crossed the stepping-stones with the sure step of a mountain goat, and went towards the wood, hesitating a little and slowing down as she neared it and began to look about. John sat down on a boulder by the brook's edge, lighted a cigarette, and waited for her. She came back in a few minutes and frowned perplexedly at him.

"That's odd. I can't find the way to it. Explain to me! What did *you* find?"

"Nothing. There isn't anything or anybody. I made quite sure." They laughed out loud.

"Well, we didn't get any tea," she said.

"It's queer that you, a moor maid, should have been deceived as much as I, an uninitiated *forasteiro*. I wasn't quite sure at first that you had not put a spell on me," he said. They climbed the hill in silence, she meekly letting him help her up rough and slippery places. At the brow of the hill she stopped, hot and a little breathless, turned to look down, and suddenly caught Ware's arm.

"But look! There is something there! It is a house!—Why, I can see the smoke—look!"

He looked down and saw the patch of wood again resolved into the semblance of ordered ranks, the dim outlines of house walls between

them, and heard, borne upon the ascending honey-laden gust, a faint sound like the wail of a very young child.

They stood motionless, hand in hand, for some moments, until at last she said seriously: "It is a house of faëry." She turned a flushed face upon him, her eyes dark, her lips parted childishly.

"At least we seem to share it," he responded gently, and they stood looking at each other with intent inquiry, as if to discover a mystery, as if seeking for some mutual secret. A sudden idea took possession of John Ware that this young thing, this bright slip of a country girl, with her look of wonder, was beloved now and always. Moved by impulse, he raised her hand to his lips and at that she, by no means embarrassed (you couldn't embarrass a wood nymph), broke into smiles that cooled him. She turned to the road.

I think that John Ware loved her from that time, although certainly without any thought of rousing love in her; to his vision she belonged to another world, dancing on the edge of a realm that was out of mental and physical touch with the serious and difficult task to which he was committed. But he saw her as a dear and sweet child, an adorable creature, probably destined to some brilliant future in which he would never have a share. They had at least this one thing in common, this partnership in the house of faëry, this witchery of the moor.

They walked to the station in a soft afterglow that gave the heather a bright regal splendor, dying away to shrouded dusk. Arrived at Sansoe, Ware had scarcely time to drink the belated tea that Aunt Kitty had kept, and to return to the railway to take the west-bound train.

III

FROM that day preparations went forward steadily. Francina, going back with Salvatore to the London boarding house where they lived rather precariously, paying bills whenever a slice of luck supervened, borrowed a sewing machine and sat all day surrounded by chiffons. A hard worker when she had any interest in working, although hating anyone to know it and consistently affecting idle-princess airs in public, she now scarcely raised her head from her dainty seams except to study a score. She sang arias lightly as she cut and stitched.

Dowered with a good contralto voice of sustained quality and fair range, her sound early training had been ceaselessly supplemented by Salvatore during their four years of marriage. She had constantly sung small parts in provincial recitals and traveling companies, and, while Margarita's light and flexible soprano outclassed her sister's voice in natural beauty, Francina's feet were already accustomed to the boards while the younger girl was nothing but a rank although promising amateur.

They were to sail just before Christmas. Salvatore, returning from a hasty visit to Italy, looking over the field for a cheap but efficient company, was triumphant and a little boastful. He ransacked England now for second hand scenery "at a reasonable rate," for most of the drops as well as important equipment and accessories would

have to be taken to the Amazon. You could depend upon faking up garden scenes and ordinary interiors locally, but it was just as well to remember that even canvas and paint might not be available in unlimited quantities. After all, the place was a thousand miles up the river, and the river was four or five thousand miles from paint shops.

This question of scenery, plus the even more agitated one of costumes, offered rocks for the opera program. But it was not until the final decision could be averted no longer that Salvatore called a council.

Margarita, spending a week in town with Aunt Kitty, shopping joyfully, walked in one foggy afternoon upon the consultation. A somewhat ruffled group, whose storm center was Salvatore, sat about a large table, covered with a mass of operatic scores, lists, sheets of paper, and telegram forms. He screamed at Margarita as she came forward:

"Margie, you will have to be second violin, leading soprano, and première danseuse. How's that?"

"And dresser and sceneshifter probably," murmured Francina, sitting at a safe distance from her husband.

"Anything you like," declared the girl. "What in the world are you all doing?"

"Preparing plans for the siege of the Amazon, my darling," her brother-in-law assured her. "Come here and sit by me and tell me what you think of this." He took up a scribbled sheet. "You see, we've only got a couple of thousand pounds in advance from our friends across the Atlantic, so we have to go a bit easy on extravagances. Francina says she could spend all that

two thousand on clothes for herself, but I say that she and you can have sixty pounds between you and not a penny more. I have to have scenery, don't I?" He began to get a little worked up. "Do I or don't I?" he asked the company. "Don't I have to go back to Italy and drag out of the gutters or some mangy boarding house a dozen of the best-looking girls I can get cheap? Don't I? Don't I have to have some money to get their clothes out of pawn? And to have them all bathed and scrubbed and buy them a change of underwear? Good God, what's two thousand pounds, I ask you?"

As he addressed the table, Salvatore gradually grew hotter, until perspiration stood upon his forehead; he waved the paper with one hand and with the other grasped Margarita's arm and shook it. His voice filled the room.

"You're quite right, Salvie," she said soothingly, smiling upon him with candid eyes. He subsided a little.

"Very well. You always did have a grain or two of sense and sympathy, Margie!" He glared about him. "Very good. Now let's see just where we stand. First, what are we going to present? . . . 'Carmen' they must have, although God knows where I am going to get the scenery and the clothes: think of hauling it seven thousand miles and then another thousand up the Amazon. I am going to cable them that it can't be done. But who ever heard of a tenth-rate opera that didn't give 'Carmen'? If we were going to be any class we might have the pluck not to——" He wiped his forehead.

"Very well. There's no difficulty about the parts, it's only the staging and dressing. Why,

you could sing *Carmen* at a pinch, Margarita. Put down 'Carmen'; we shall have to give it, even if we don't have any decent scenery. Now, 'Il Trovatore'—what do you all think? It's easy, and so's 'Marta.'?"

He regarded the faces before him. Bianca Santana, swarthy, very handsome, his principal contralto, sat with her eyes shut; she had known him for years, and took no notice of his pretense at temper.

"All right. We'll put down those two. Everybody in South America knows 'Trovatore' by heart, anyway, so if my company can't sing, the audience will. Next, the 'Cavalleria,' of course. There's no costuming in that; you could wear your petticoats, girls, and a red handkerchief. . . . Now, about 'Tosca,' that takes dressing and singing too——"

At this point Margarita interrupted him. "Who's your principal soprano?"

He groaned aloud. "If only you were trained enough, Margie! I suppose I must get that evil-tempered, stupid, conceited, lazy little cat of a Beatriz Sforzi. She knows how to sing, although she hasn't half the voice she ought to have, and she looks well from the front. She will quarrel with everybody, of course, and she will raise the devil generally. That's why she is out of a job just now. I hate the sight of her. But there you are—she knows her business, and she'll travel without grumbling till she gets to the hotel, anyhow. That girl was born on the stage and she'll die on it, mark my words. She's in Paris this minute, and if Laroche can't rope her in I must."

Laroche, a pale and slim young man with melancholy eyes and black hair *en brosse*, uttered a groan.

"You don't want me to travel with her, I hope?" said Francina frostily. He cast down his eyes. "Certainly not. Not the Atlantic trip, anyway. Don't you worry. I wouldn't have her on the same boat as any of the other principals for sixteen days. I know very well there's no living with that girl. No, I think we can decide now—can't we?—that Laroche will bring all the continental party in the Italian boat sailing Boxing Day."

Laroche nodded. "The two violinists from Rome—the first violin conducts, doesn't he?—and the trombone and flute and two others . . . and a cartload of costumes I got cheap in Madrid, and a dozen pretty Italian girls. Yes."

Wasn't it rather taking a risk to divide the party? Margarita wondered.

Francina shrugged her shoulders, and Salvatore said grimly that he thought Laroche would be equal to the job. "I'll answer for *my* lot. We shall have all the principals except the Sforzi and Laroche if the baritone comes with me, and that little Portuguese tenor boy who's taking on little parts—like you, Margie."

"We shan't have to chase each other up and down the Amazon?" Laroche hoped.

"Not quite. We shall get to Pará first, probably a day or two ahead, and we'll wait for you. Now, let's get back to our opera program, girls."

The door opened to admit a fat and prosperous-looking young man with a cheerful grin, Mortimer Bassett, a country neighbor of the Channings and an adorer from childhood of Francina. Nobody knew, perhaps not even Francina herself, why she had suddenly married Salvatore instead, during the year of her musical training in Italy. Passionately and openly lamenting her loss, Mortimer

nevertheless remained on good terms with her and included Salvatore in his affection for all that was Francina's. He went and sat beside her now, distressed at the prospect of the Brazilian adventure, but making efforts to be cheerful about it.

Salvatore went on: "Now look here! We have only got three operas fixed on: 'Carmen,' 'Trovatore' and the 'Cavalleria.' Now what about 'Aïda'?"

"Impossible!" declared Laroche. "The Nile scene's all right, but what about the enormous chorus, and the double scene at the end? No, impossible."

"It's popular in South America. They do it in B. A.," meditated Salvatore. "We could cut a lot of the chorus out. And it's one of the really singer-proof ones. Couldn't we cut out that temple-destruction scene?"

"It might be as well to give the Brazilians a chance to recognize our operas?" Francina thought.

Receiving no encouragement, Salvatore went on with the next item. "'La Bohème,' of course. No dressing or scenery to speak of, and everybody likes it. Francie, don't forget to take your muff with you."

"It isn't mine," murmured Francina. "And a muff in Manáos, Salvie! How intolerable! Let's change it to an electric fan."

"Very well, that's four. 'Faust.' We shall have to give it."

"Too much chorus; think of it!—soldiers, the *kermesse* angels——"

"We can cut them out, lots of them."

"Couldn't manage the Brocken scene."

"Cut it out." Salvatore was getting mechanical. He wrote the name down.

"Next. 'Pagliacci,' of course. Any objections? No? All right. Now 'Tosca.' Nothing we can't do in that. Charming music." He began to sing "*Mario, Mario, Mario! Per ch  chiuso?*"

"There is quite much costuming in 'Tosca,'" remarked Bianca, opening her eyes.

"Francina, can't you and Margarita fix up the clothes?"

Margarita began to laugh. "I tell you what I will do! I'll make the clothes for the 'Pagliacci' columbine, if you'll let me have her part," she promised.

"You'll do *all* the odd jobs, my child," he agreed. "You're a tower of strength to me. Now, there's 'Rigoletto' . . . I am not very keen on it, but I'm open to reason. And what about 'Butterfly'?"

"Not dramatic enough, not for South America," Laroche was sure. "There's only one song in it."

"There's only one song in any opera," retorted Salvatore. He took up one of the cable forms, looked earnestly at what he had written, and reflected. "While I am about it I might just as well ask for another thousand." He put in a few words. "When I think what I am paying out to the steamship companies I can't sleep at night." When John Ware came in a few minutes later he was considering just what he could do "if anything happens to the chorus, or the theatre burns down or we lose the scenery or something." It was just as well to be prepared for contingencies . . . and you knew what had happened to the first company that went to the Amazon, when the

impresario couldn't find a single one of his chorus girls after he'd given the first performance, and had to go round the town and beg people just to lend him Lucia and Marietta, just for an hour or two, please, just so he could give the next performance; and you remembered that they never did give more than the second—there wasn't a girl to be found. . . . One shouldn't forget that those things did happen, although he personally intended to keep the chorus under lock and key.

"We can always fall back upon scenes like the trio from 'Aïda' and the duet in the church from 'Tosca,' and the scene between *Margherita* and the devil—*No, tu non dei pregar*. And there's the 'Rigoletto' quartet . . ."

"I am dying for tea," Francina said to Mortimer under her breath; she got up and began to move to the door, as Salvatore added absent-mindedly, "And there are quite a few nice deaths, we could use some of them."

Somebody laughed and he protested: "Everybody *likes* those deaths! They're not like 'Butterfly,' downright miserable, but good, wholesome, jolly deaths."

At this point Bianca raised her fine eyelashes again. "Why do you take scenery? There is everything you could want in Buenos Aires. I know there is. My sister was there once with a Spanish company. Ask them to lend it." Salvatore looked at her with grieved reproach.

"From just around the corner? Yes, that's a wonderful idea. Ever seen a map, Bianca darling?" He lit a cigarette and entreated: "Won't somebody take them all out to tea? Will you, Mortimer, old chap? Ware? . . . No, I won't come. I have to send this cable, and then I must think out some scenery—something transformable. A

church interior that will reverse into the bed of *Mimi*."

Francina, standing before the mirror arranging her veil, began speaking to Mortimer in a far-away, sentimental voice, her eyes turned on the fond young man: "Before I go to Brazil, I must have a search made for the details of our noble Portuguese ancestry. I know that our great-grandfather was a great *fidalgo* of the court of——"

Salvatore burst in upon her with a shriek of laughter. He cried between spasms: "Oh, Francina, that's the first I ever heard of him! What an awfully good idea! Do look him up. It'll cost you ten pounds to have a tree made, and I'll put another figure on to this cable on the strength of it. But say, you be careful, dear! You might find out he was a toothpick maker in Lisbon. Most of 'em were, you know. The *fidalgo* ancestor——!" He sobbed with joy.

His wife fastened her veil without diminution of her equanimity, remarking with a lovely smile: "If Salvatore only wouldn't speak I could be so proud of him! He looks so nice, doesn't he? Like a Rafael fallen angel or something. And then he talks like a *gamin*."

Salvatore protested, still convulsed: "No, no, dearest, you wrong me! East Side New York. I got my wide knowledge of life on Third Avenue and my nice manners on Division Street. . . . It's true I learnt my repartee from the Five Points, but I did acquire my musical technique in Macdougall Alley. . . . *gamin*, indeed!"

Mortimer, opening the door for the girls, let them and Ware pass through and shut it behind him with the suspicion of a slam.

IV

TELEPHONING next day to Margarita, Ware used guile. "It's quite necessary for you to make the acquaintance of our Amazon tropics before you sail. . . . Come and eat yellow rice with chicken, and then let's go down to Kew."

They lunched gaily in a little Spanish restaurant and took an early afternoon train. The morning had been of the misty and rather raw variety, but now gleams of sun appeared, piercing the haze and creating opalescent tints. Over Kew the sky was patched with blue and through the lacy gates the green velvet turf lay flooded with golden light.

They spent a few moments in the house at the left of the entrance, full of chastened hardwoods: huge trunks of tropic-grown trees, tamed, limbless, their external beauty despoiled and their hearts smoothed and polished to show the record of long years.

Deciding that this was a mournful sight, they abandoned it and walked the many gravelled paths. Beside them, masses of ordered plants grew in obedient precision, flourishing sedately beneath the artful hand of the experimenter—the experimenter who would bend and color their children as he had bent their forefathers to his decorative scheme.

Flowing slopes of emerald turf lay broken by groups of great trees, some still clothed in russet and yellow, but many manifestly sleeping. The

flowers were nearly all gone, a belated rose emphasizing the lack of color, and for long stretches the evergreens dominated, somber and a little forbidding. Berberis glowed: the yews' fruit shone like tiny oranges. A strange clump of cinnamon-branched arbutus stood in full bloom.

The gardens were empty of people. London was at work, and these two felt like runaways half forgiven by a busy world because they faced adventure. Near the gates a wrinkled old gardener swept the fallen leaves aside; a pale girl walked with a young man, both talking earnestly and paying no heed to the gardens; a couple of gardeners sang and laughed as they worked on the roof of one of the glass houses; a bearded person in strange tweeds paced up and down, reading from a tiny book. They saw no one else.

Seeking tropics, Ware took her first to the orchid houses. They were all riot and glow despite the outer chill. The atmosphere was a warm breath: the attitude and colors of the extraordinary flowers, with their bold and cunning devices, made them seem like living presences. Ware, an orchid devotee, took her to some of his favorites.

. . . "That thing with the crimson stars is an *Odontioda* . . . and this is one of the *Cymbidiums*. . . ." She laughed, declaring that looked like a flock of frightened geese rising from a pond. "You can almost hear them squawking."

"Here are some you'll see if you come up the Negro to the islands——" white beauties with gold-splashed lips. "These are rather rare; but you can get barrel loads of these other pink and mauve *Cattleyas* if you like them."

She asked him idly if he went orchid hunting.

"Sometimes. You know I have an interest in a

strip of rubber forest, a seringal, up the river, and I often go up there for a few days to look after things. I have a motor boat and a little house near the river's edge. You wouldn't call it a house—it's a palm-thatched hut with a hammock and an oil stove for furniture. But if you ever come there I can give you a cup of very good coffee," he promised.

She smiled at him across a flower of hyacinth blue. "You might treat me as badly as you did at Tregennen about the tea."

He came quickly to her side, taken with a sudden anxiety. "Miss Channing, tell me, please! Have you said anything—about that? About the house of faëry?" She put her hand into his like a child.

"Oh, no! Of course not! No one could explain it. Or understand, could they? That was ours, you know." She spoke with an innocently candid air, her eyes very blue in her smiling face, and Ware murmured: "Heaven bless you!" into the heavy leaves of a jutting orchid as she turned away.

The air outside had a bite in it, and they went quickly to the big palm house, where great simple giants flatten their fronds against the glass roof. From one lofty heart an immense spathe of bloom hung downwards, like the blonde tresses of an Amazonian oread.

Leading the way to a tree that stood erect, smooth-stemmed, with quantities of three-fingered leaves, Ware waved an introduction."

"Your host, mademoiselle. Your wealthy and most hospitable host."

"Ah, that's rubber?"

"No less." She regarded it thoughtfully. "How did they ever bring it here?"

"They didn't. Shall I tell you?" He was a little diffident about giving instruction, but she was inclined to listen, and said so. Ware spoke briefly. "It is really an extraordinarily romantic tale, but I'll cut it short. A man went up the Amazon and fetched back a trunkful of rubber seeds. He brought them here to Kew and they tried to make them grow. . . . It was in 1876. They didn't know how, but they nursed them like babies . . . and this is one of the infants. I think about two thousand of them grew out of seventy thousand seeds.

"When they had got the little seedlings, they couldn't keep them here, of course; they had to bring them up in some hot place like the Amazon. So they were taken to Ceylon and Borneo and all over Malaysia. Lots of them died. But a heap lived. And in about five or six years some of them began to flower, and when the seeds ripened the planters set them out in new plantations. Then in another year or two they tapped the oldest and strongest of the trees to see if they would yield the rubber milk. Until that moment they didn't know whether their trees were any good or not—whether they were able to produce rubber away from their own home."

He stopped and the girl prompted him. "What happened?"

"It was all right, but they couldn't cure it as the natives do on the Amazon. They hadn't got the nuts to burn for the smoke, and they didn't get them because the Amazon government passed a law forbidding the export of those nuts or of any more rubber seed. And then the Ceylon planters began to get the idea that they had never really had the best kind of seed—we are not sure even

now. The East is producing thousands of tons of rubber now—but there seems to be a difference . . . between black trees and white trees, from the lower river or the upper. I am trying to find out just what the difference is—whether it's only the curing. . . ." He spoke a little absently and then suddenly started.

"I beg your pardon! I am boring you to death! Forgive me! What need you care about the troubles of a poor rubber planter?"

"Indeed I care . . . since, as you say, rubber is my kind host. . . . Rubber's the reason why Brazil has so much money?" He answered her seriously.

"North Brazil, yes. To-day and perhaps to-morrow. But these rubber stepchildren have grown so fast in the East since Kew nursed those seeds, you see. . . . When the Malaysia planters are shipping out two hundred thousand tons of rubber in a few years' time, with all the industry organized on a business plan, it may not be so easy for the Amazon. I hope so—I love the country and the people. There's plenty of room for all the rubber in the world . . . but these booms! Rather a curse, I am afraid. Give people a wrong sense of proportion."

He gave the tree a military salute, with a gay gesture. "Come, I know this is frightfully dull for you. Do you want to see anything else?"

She looked at him over her shoulder as she walked out. "Yes. In return for your rubber lecture, I'll let you into the secret of another of my hidden loves. The North Gallery, for a minute, please."

Outside, the light was declining: a haze crept among the trees. They walked quickly to the gallery, and stood in a maze of sedulous pictures.

Margarita's eyes commanded sympathy. "I know all their faults," she declared. "But do please like them! Think of all the happy hours and weeks and years she spent, sitting in swamps and forests and deserts, to paint all her beloved pictures of flowers. I have such a joy in her, because she did just what she wanted to do. And she wasn't a bit afraid of her jungles. . . . Think of that little gentle Victorian old maid——"

He laughed. "Of course she wasn't afraid! She wasn't stealing from them. It's we who try to commercialize jungles who ought to be terrified of them."

She considered this. "Yes. But, somehow, *you* don't look much like a thief, do you know? Are you? I tell you what you had better do. When you have finished all your dark deeds, come back and create a tropical garden like Marion North's, and make your peace."

"Let's make a bargain. You start the garden, and I'll come and dig in it."

A thought struck her. "The garden of the house of faëry?"

She said it smiling, but ceased to smile as he turned a moved face with intense bright eyes upon her. He opened his lips to speak, but shut them again with a visible effort. They stood with deep looks together for a long minute and then she moved, going to the inside room and calling him to help her to find Brazilian pictures. As they came out again she asked him: "Do tell me, who can I take for my Third Favorite Woman? I've got two. This Marion North first; and then Lucrezia Borgia. But I never could decide on the third."

He searched in space. "Helen?"

She was shocked. "No, indeed! Just a rather

stupid beauty. I have thought of Cleopatra, but she wasn't much better. Queen Elizabeth? No, I don't think so. I shall have to wait. Perhaps I shall find my third candidate up the Amazon."

He persuaded her to walk through the avenue of cedars before leaving the gardens. The dark trees, immensely tall in the sunset, stood erect in sombre pride, puritanical withstanders of the winter. Their silhouettes were stark against the clear gold of the sky. Margarita, turning to speak to her companion here, encountered a look that enveloped her with a kind of poignant tenderness. She gave him a frank smile but said a little hurriedly, glancing at her watch: "Do you know, we are going to be horribly late? Let's go. Which is the nearest——"

"Late for what?" he demanded.

"Mortimer's tea at the Criterion. Don't you remember? His disagreeable sister, too. He wants to cry over us, and Mrs. Grenville is going to think of spiteful things to say to Francina. But Francina always beats her. She can be insulting so sweetly and calmly, but Mrs. Grenville always gets red in the face. I don't like her a bit."

"Well, I haven't met her yet, but I'm on your side, so I don't like her either," he declared gravely, his eyes on the bright tendrils of hair that crisped on her neck. There never was anything in the world so enchanting as the skin of her, lightly shaded with gold, and flushed on her round cheeks with such a soft flame-red. . . . He followed her through the gates, seized with an insane feeling that he couldn't bear to let her return to all that tribe of tiresome people, among whom she walked as a little wood sprite escaped into a dan-

gerous world. He did not dare to suggest letting the engagement slide, and meekly took her back to town.

They scarcely exchanged a word on the way, she sitting in a corner of the carriage and saying when he spoke to her: "Please, let me remember my orchids and palm trees. I like to go over them in my mind. . . . You know, if we are to make all that long voyage on the same ship, we must be really good friends; good enough friends not to talk, sometimes. It isn't always necessary to speak, when people understand?"

Entering the Criterion they walked into another world. The hot rooms, blazing with light, were chiefly tenanted with couples—pairs of young heads leaning together; the more sophisticated at least affecting a negligent air with each other. The soft murmur of English voices, pitched in such tones that they only carried a yard, merged into a lightly assaulting wave as the door opened; there was an agreeable smell of tea and hot muffins. Discreet waiters hovered about with little trays of sandwiches and colored cakes.

In a corner half screened by a shrub sat Francina and Mortimer. The lady, wearing a white fur cap, assumed with it a deceitful atmosphere of innocence. He, fat and agitated, gulped boiling tea and gazed upon her as she chattered. The newcomers were greeted hospitably, but Francina commented with protests upon Margarita's complexion. "You will ruin your skin, darling, running about in the cold without a veil. You are quite red."

Ware permitted himself a certain impertinence in countering this attack. "She is most beauti-

fully rosy," he assured Francina. "As you, dear Mrs. Antonelli, are most beautifully pale——" She interrupted him with an infinitesimal shriek. "Pale?" She snatched her handbag, seized a tiny object, gazed into its surface with passionate attention, and declared, "So I am. That new liquid rouge is no good at all . . ."

Ware went on calmly: "But whatever the merits of your complexions, mesdames, I beg to assure you that you will get no credit for them on the Amazon."

Margarita wanted to know where Salvatore was.

"You know how he hates tea! But he'll come in later with Laroche. They've gone to buy a tame bull for 'Carmen'," Francina thought, and, looking across at the entrance, murmured with great sweetness, "Here's your dear sister, Mortimer, just coming in with Aunt Kitty."

The two elderly women came towards them, smiling. Aunt Kitty had her usual air of pleasant efficiency; Mrs. Grenville swept the room with a slightly derogatory eye. She was so well upholstered that her stoutness was under control, and she subtly conveyed the impression that she had been born middle-aged and handsomely dressed. She did not like Francina, and seemed to swell a little as she looked at her. An instinct of feminine defence cried "Danger!" and she was unmelted by lovely smiles.

As they sank into the chairs adjusted by the two men, exchanging greetings, Francina put up a deprecating hand. "Dearest Mrs. Grenville, I don't wonder that you gaze upon my clothes! Did you know it was the last time they are to appear upon me? These are the ultimate remnants of my

woolen garments, and to-morrow I am going to pawn these, buy pink chiffon with my last penny, and sail shivering."

Aunt Kitty interjected through laughter: "My dear, be careful. You will catch your death of cold. . . . I'm not sure that she doesn't mean it! I know her."

"Nobody knows me," Francina objected, smiling gently. "But I *do* mean it. And I shan't die of cold, because I shall go to bed directly I get on board ship and stay there until we attain warm weather. I am nearly always seasick, and anyway I shall enjoy being waited on."

"I'm afraid you'll stay in bed until we are in sight of land, in that case," Ware said. "The Atlantic is quite capable of being cold all the way over."

"I don't care. I must have pink chiffon." She went on talking quickly, countering Mrs. Grenville's rather heavy condescensions towards the two girls, and that lady was thrust back upon a comparison of shopping notes with Aunt Kitty. To her she always adopted an air of pity kept in check by a good heart, a pity that had two bases: first, Mrs. Channing's childlessness, and next, her execrable and even lamentable taste in having given up an entirely comfortable, satisfactory widowhood in order to marry the casual Arthur Channing with his assortment of children and peculiar associates. Secretly, she considered Arthur Channing as a trifle mentally unbalanced, regarded the entire menage with suspicion, and was excellently confirmed in her judgment by the present escapade. It had no other name. Salvatore, an impudent foreigner, was anathema to her,

and she really remained on speaking terms with Aunt Kitty only in order to have the satisfaction of conveying her opinions.

Mortimer, never able to realize his sister's attitude, nor to save himself from the elementary mistake of exalting a young woman before the face of an elderly one, turned to her under cover of other talk and began to speak of Francina in a low voice, "Isn't she wonderful! She is the most beautiful woman in the world, and yet she is so unselfish, so modest. So few people understand her."

"You do, of course," Mrs. Grenville interjected with portly sarcasm entirely lost upon the young man.

He went on, "Yes, yes, of course! Before all you others came in she was explaining to me that she hates to go away, leaving behind so much that she—she—cares for, but she is really only thinking of Margarita. She believes that there will be some great future for the child as a result. . . . She confided all her dreams to me. She is sacrificing herself. She seems so gay, but her heart is wonderful. . . . She is a pure white flame."

Mrs. Grenville was quite excusably roused to wrath. She made the mistake, however, of showing temper. "A pure white fiddlestick!" she retorted, without dignity. "Francina is perfectly callous."

Mortimer flushed heavily. "You hurt *me*, Agnes," he protested. "Not her. No one could. She is above it. You don't mean that. You don't understand her."

"I understand her quite well." Her smile was appalling. Mortimer did not hear. With eyes fixed on Francina and a catch in his voice he murmured, "God bless her sweet face! Wherever she goes,

however long she stays away, she'll find me waiting when she comes back."

"You seem to forget that she has a husband," his sister said, but was startled by the sudden anger of the amiable Mortimer. "Forget! Good heavens! What detestable ideas you have, Agnes! Why, Salvatore is my dearest friend! Forget, indeed!" He breathed indignation. "If Francina would let me serve her, clean her little shoes, do any mortal thing, I should never want a sign from her. I'd prefer she didn't even thank me." He swallowed tea hastily, his face scarlet.

Francina, observing the hasty interchange from the corners of her eyes, murmured to Margarita, "Agnes Grenville is saying cattish things about me to Mortimer. I know she is. The poor dear is quite upset. I do hope there's a special hell for respectable married women like Agnes."

Aloud she cried, gaily impertinent, "Mortimer, dear, please don't go about telling people how much you are going to miss me. You won't get a bit of sympathy. Besides, sentimentality is a dreadful crime."

Salvatore, approaching unseen, stood behind her chair, a diamond ring flashing from the hand with which he stroked back his blue-black hair. He contributed at once, "It's the salvation of the world. What's even more to the point, it's the salvation of me. For example, it is Amazonian sentimentality that has just cabled me another thousand pounds."

Everybody laughed, but Francina protested, "No, that's sentiment, Salvie, quite a different thing. Admirable sentiment. . . . I should display more emotion if I had the least chance of seeing even the glimmer of that money. No, what I

was warning Mortimer against was the sort of sentimentality that makes a man suddenly marry his cook—like Squire Hunt, you know.”

Mortimer had recovered his equanimity and rejoined with smiles, “That wasn’t sentimentality. That was the wonderful Welsh rabbits she used to make. And if he’d stopped to think for a moment he’d have married the Welsh rabbit instead. That was his real love.”

“The cook or the Welsh rabbit, whichever you like. So long as a man marries I approve both his choice and his reasons,” declared Salvatore, sitting down beside Aunt Kitty. “I am a great believer in the marriage of men. Women, of course, should always remain virgins. . . .”

Mrs. Channing hastily interposed a shower of words between the rash man and the eye of Agnes Grenville. “Quite right, my dear boy! There’s no object on earth so wretched as an old bachelor, especially the calculating ones who always mean to get married and keep putting it off for some motive or other, and spend a hateful old age at last with not a soul to speak to. Old women at any rate can always nurse somebody else’s babies.”

“Well, if you are all talking about me, I am immensely obliged to you for outlining my future so neatly,” said Mortimer, his fat face wreathed in smiles, and devouring petits fours. “Aren’t these things frightfully good with the pink stuff on the top? Antonelli, do have some tea and eat some of these.”

“No, no. I am breaking myself in for the Amazon. Is the food going to be very bad, Ware?”

Ware considered. “Depends how you take it. If you’re thinking all the time of juicy mutton chops and strawberries, then you’ll grumble. But

if you can get along with Frenchy kind of stews and soups, and lots of sweets and black coffee and eggs, you'll cotton to it all right."

"Think of all the delicious tropical fruit," somebody suggested.

Ware thought that that was rather a fraud. "All the best tropic fruit already comes here—mangoes and pineapples and bananas—if you call bananas fruit. I think they're like eating a well-soaped flannel bandage. As a matter of fact I would give all the tropical fruits in the world except the mangoes and pineapples for a plate of ripe cherries, any day."

"Don't chill our ardor, Mr. Ware," Francina begged him.

"Not for the world. Personally, I am very fond of South American food, but I don't want you to be disappointed. Of course, the best cooking in all the Americas is really Negro cooking—African ideas. All the best places to eat are those where there is a big remnant of slave population, North or South. The famous cooking of the south of the United States is first cousin to the Bahia cooking of Brazil. They like to call it French, but it isn't, it's African, and half the stuff they use in it was brought from the West Coast."

"Ah, Jamaican pepper pot!" cried Salvatore, shutting his eyes. "I dream of it to this day."

"You know Jamaica?"

"I was born in the West Indies——" began Salvatore, but was interrupted by Mrs. Grenville, who stared at him through a lorgnette.

"Mr. Antonelli's memory deserts him. The last time I had the pleasure of meeting him I remember his saying that he was born in Corsica."

"Well, being born in a lot of places is better

than being dead in a lot," said the gentleman cheerfully. "Anyway, the food's good in Jamaica. Girls, let's start a South American restaurant in Piccadilly when we get back from the Amazon with all our loot."

"All right. With special alcoves for ex-presidents and revolutionaries. Ware, you could gather in all the Brazilian exiles."

"They don't exile people from Brazil," protested Ware, but was chidden.

"Don't undermine the faith of our childhood! You know they do! Any newspaper says so. All South American countries are always having revolutions, and every man big enough to carry a gun goes about shooting presidents. We know it. Any shilling novel with the word South America in it says so." He looked at his wife. "Francina, you look ill. Are you tired, honey?"

"No. It's that horrid new rouge betrayed me. I wish you wouldn't look at me. How I do envy women who are downright plain! Nobody minds if they go about looking like scarecrows. Their husbands like them just as well if their hair is a sight and their noses shiny. But if I don't look like a new doll Salvatore is furious."

"That's the worst of being a reputed beauty, my dear," Mrs. Grenville smiled with tight lips, but Francina was unruffled.

"Yes, that's just it. Let me go while I have a shred of that reputation left. . . ."

V.

THEY sailed on a raw morning a few days before Christmas. For nearly a week bad weather and choppy seas prevailed, and, with the steamer rolling and pitching in the sea troughs, Francina kept her word and stayed in bed. But Margarita, with amateur's luck, found herself with sea legs after the second day. The decks were impossible, swept by gusts and slippery with ice; she spent most of each day in a corner in company with a Portuguese dictionary and a copy of *Innocencia*.

When the weather cleared and the decks dried under the ministrations of a searching sun, the tables began to be filled at meal times with people who glanced at each other with the pessimism of the experienced traveler. The boat, of a line that cared more for cargo than passengers, was limited in saloon capacity and the crowd was small although varied. It included a group of Portuguese, pale, stout men with oval faces; a couple of exquisitely dressed young Austrian women who scarcely appeared except at meals, bore themselves with an impossible air of inimical reserve, and only spoke to exchange a few sentences in French with each other; a few Brazilians of the North, in Paris-made clothes, wearing the tiniest polished buttoned boots; an American drummer, taking jewelry to the Amazon, owner of an immense diamond scarfpin and a gray leather face; a Swiss, very lively and talkative, partner in a rubber

house at Manáos, with a bleached appearance as if he had been grown in the dark.

Two of the Brazilians and the Swiss commerciante were known to Ware, and it was not long before the sociable Salvatore had taken them to his bosom. A relative of the younger Brazilian, Affonso Guimaraes de Freitas, was in fact one of the opera company's sponsors; the young man, very good looking, slim and dark, appeared to be unable to take his eyes from the back of Margarita's neck: he was much too polite to stare at her pretty face. With him was an elderly uncle, Custodio de Freitas, a yellow, wizened, and rather small man with brilliant eyes and a manner of such kindness that women instinctively loved and trusted him. Like all Brazilians of the intelligentsia, these two spoke French beautifully, and understood English and German; the usual working knowledge of English had in their cases been supplemented through old-established personal relations with British and American business houses, and Custodio still spoke with feeling and chastened respect of the English governess of his youth who had taught him his beautiful flowing penmanship. It was he who had made his nephew spend a couple of years at an English school to learn games, before going to Paris to complete his education.

For Ware, Margarita came into perspective again only after an interval. During the last days of preparation as in the first adjustments of ship-board life she had seemed to recede; he lost the moorland girl in a maze of unfamiliar gabbling people, behind piles of trunks, in a whirl of small excitements.

He was suddenly conscious of recovering her on

an evening when, looking in at a lighted window from the darker and cooler deck, he saw her bright head and curve of cheek close to the opening. She stood watching a rather fierce bridge game from which Salvatore's face rose triumphant, beaming, his plumed forehead shining. Natural-born citizen of the world, Salvatore absorbed his social medium like a sponge.

Ware went in and stood beside Margarita. She wore a little white lace dress, her arms and neck uncovered. He was suddenly pricked to consciousness of her physical perfection, but this renewed perception was almost at once overlaid by a more subtle quality of magnetism, a quality of which her nymphlike air of withdrawal was a constant denial. He saw her as if always across the stream in the magic garden, half seen through tall bushes.

"You don't play bridge?" he heard himself ask her stupidly. He must make her speak, bring her out of her fastness.

"I am afraid to play cards. I have too much luck. All the aces come to me," she answered under her breath, giving him her candid eyes. Bravo! She had run across the stepping-stones, over the stream, slipped her hand into his, and was again walking beside him on secure ground.

"Of course!" he murmured, and then spoke the rest of his thought with daring. "Of course you would have luck! You, a moor maiden, in league with Pan and the pixies. Naturally, they slip in and give you everything you look for. . . . If ever you try washing for gold in the rivers when you get to Brazil, you'll find your pan full of nuggets every time."

She laughed out at this and Salvatore, sitting

back watching the dealing, turned at the delicious sound, took Margarita's hand and patted it.

"Blessed little mascot! Stay right there, Margie darling," he enjoined her. Ware was instantly conscious of an impulse to beat the good Salvatore. How dared he, how dared any man, touch that wonderful girl! Astonished at the acuteness of his own feeling, he stood back a little farther behind Margarita, regarding her as she bent smiling over Salvatore's shoulder. He tried to look at her with the eyes of other people. What did *they* see in her?—this beautiful piece of youth, a creature who was apparently very simple when she presented herself to you, but who was so often in the act of retreat. Was it only he who could realize her possession of precious qualities that melted the heart and drew the soul? . . . her extraordinary sense of values, her capacity for prizing things hidden from or neglected by most people.

He repeated to himself, doggedly, that she was elementally simple when he could definitely bring her to his side; but there clung about her some intangible thing, a hint of mystery, of something perilous and entrancingly promising, that made her stand apart, inevitably, among a crowd of women. Watching the gesture of her lightly clasped hands as she answered some trivial thing, he said to himself that she was rather a still, virginal creature, making no effort at all to use her lovely looks as many much younger women used theirs, that she had, really, nothing extraordinary to say in that tender voice, all tones of rainbow and pearl. . . . There was almost a veil about her—no, no, he had been right before! Not a veil, but a screen of golden-green fluttering leaves. Beyond them, you could imagine those young hands

raised to push away much more easily than you could conceive them outstretched to embrace. Denial was written upon that leafy screen—but when she gave! He was convinced that when she did give it would be a complete giving. Her strange appeal seemed to be some inner sense of adventure, the love of the unknown, of the withdrawn. To get into real communion with her, if you were to follow her instead of bringing her to you, what you would need of searching, of pursuit in immense distances! She called to all desire of the unspeakable joys and dangers of far journeying.

Margarita turned and asked him some small question. He, at the same time that he answered coherently, became vividly aware of the exquisite lines of her eyes and brows, seemed to plunge deep into that clear blue, into the tremendous depths of enchanted seas. Seeking, seeking, with a breathless, suspended hope of finding, at last, something splendid and dazzling . . . he came up like a half-drowned man, his heart struggling, when she had finished speaking.

She had said: "It's so hot in here. Will you come and walk outside?" and he had agreed and asked if she had a wrap, it appeared, for he found himself blindly picking up a furry garment from a settee, holding it in trembling hands as she hid her throat in it, swinging back a door for her and following her into the still dark night, with the sea racing past in long flares of phosphorescence.

Here, as they began to pace the deck, an idea came to him with extreme vividness. "I am in love with this girl. I have loved her, of course, from the beginning. But now I am in love."

He felt a little annoyed. This was a queer, an unforeseen accident. Love of this sort was danger-

ous, a source of weakness, almost an abasement of the spirit . . . it wasn't as if he was a schoolboy, without any experience. And now he had other things to do, preoccupations, a path marked out with no time for strayings in witched lands. And Margarita herself! He wouldn't dream of disturbing her, even if he could. He felt as if he were arguing with fate, as he made a kind of mental bargain—a little of her company, the sound of her voice for a few times—that surely could not be grudged to him.

“Did she like the steamer?” Idiotic question! But one must speak. It appeared that she didn't very much. “Such a stuffy place to sleep in. And planks to walk upon. And being so close to so many people. I think I am not quite happy when my feet are not on the earth. Or when I am out of the sight and smell of trees. Perhaps shut-in places are always rather terrible . . .”

He sympathized hastily, seeking bases for agreement. “Yes, and the food too, partly, I dare say. I'm afraid that if you find yourself turning out to be unconquerably British, you'll find you miss food, certain things at least, and fires. When I've been a long time in the tropics I always begin to pine for smoked haddock and kippered herrings—and a well-hung saddle of mutton. And cold grouse for breakfast. . . . There really is no compensation. But especially fires. When you see the sun, day after day, blazing away implacably in a steel sky, you long for clouds and the endless miracle of flame and smoke at your own hearth, stirred up by a poker.”

She smiled at him. “I don't mind that—yet. But I have rather a bad conscience because I don't appreciate engine rooms. I ought to be ashamed,

but the truth is that I am so much of a *savage* that I can't even be astonished at big mechanisms. They seem to me like tides or a volcano; I can't begin to understand the origin and accomplishment of them, and just accept it. Canoes, now . . . ! It's wonderful to drive a boat forward with a paddle. And beautiful, because the water is so near and friendly. . . . Here the sea might just as well be painted. One rushes along in a stuffy series of too-much-lighted rooms."

Salvatore, unable to bear the agony of the dummy, stood upon the threshold of the smoking room and beamed upon them as they approached and Ware rejoined: "Yes, one is frightfully surrounded on board ship."

Salvatore laughed aloud. "That's the word! Surrounded! Worst place on the world for a flirtation. I've tried it. Not a square inch anywhere that isn't under observation from somewhere. You take my advice."

As they walked silently, Francina appeared at the stateroom entrance, her arm about the waist of Beatriz, pale and languid, announcing herself as merely emerged for a minute to take the air before she went back to bed. She permitted Ware to pull out a chair, hunt for and arrange rugs and cushions, and rewarded him with a magnificently gracious smile, a trifle wasted upon his detached courtesy. When he went on again, leaving Margarita at her side, Beatriz turned her eyes from his retreating back and said in her sleepy voice: "Mr. Ware does not please you?"

Francina considered. She was usually frank, partly as the result of early training in an open-hearted household, and partly because she was inclined to ruthlessness. But now she fenced for a

moment. "But he does please *you*, Beatriz?" Beatriz glanced at the face of Margarita as she replied slowly:

"Yes. Because he is the sort of man who always knows when trains start and is quietly at hand with tickets and a seat on the right side, and then goes away without fussing. I hate effusive men. I am sure he would appear with sandwiches and a motor car in the middle of Africa if one happened to be lost, and would never mention it afterwards."

"You are a man hater, Beatriz," declared Francina.

"No. I am not interested in them. I only want men to be useful. To do the odd jobs that it's so tiresome to do for one's self."

"If that were my chief requirement, I shouldn't get it from my Salvatore, should I!" said Francina. "He's always asleep or has his head in the piano just when I am expiring from struggles with the luggage. It's true that Mr. Ware's frightfully useful . . . but it always seems to me that he has his eyebrows lifted. He does not really bow down. And what I consider the prime duty of man"—she laughed but was emphatic about it—"is blind adoration. He has no idea of it."

"Ah, no," agreed Beatriz comfortably, closing her eyes and not following Francina's drift. That lady, however, continued to track it, her fair head against Margarita's shoulder. She did not care greatly for the friendship between the girl and Ware, regarding him always with a hint of suspicion, as a man who demanded sportsmanship of women when he asked anything at all, and gave comradeship rather than homage. She suspected him of being the kind who judged women by men's

standards, who wanted them to be truthful, fair-dealing, to play the game. She said aloud after a moment: "I think John Ware really wants women to be gentlemen."

Margarita suddenly laughed. "Oh, no, Francie! Indeed, he hasn't any such idea. I know what he thinks. He thinks——" She stopped, suddenly struck with the consciousness that she could not say what she had begun to say, could not tell Francina this, could not explain a thing that was still strange to herself. "It's too long, and I am sleepy. I am going to bed. Good night!" She ran from their protests, but stood a long minute on the threshold, looking at a newly risen bent moon and completing, to herself, the rest of her sentence, smiling.

"He thinks we are the earth. To which he must return."

A week out from British shores, the ship's food underwent that strange chemical change peculiar to the sea, when everything tastes just alike and it is only possible to distinguish a jam omelette from a kippered herring by the eye. After that period the smoking room talks, although periodically ameliorated by the attentions of the bar, took on more pungency.

The eternal question of every new country, that of the desirable settler, cropped up more than once. Custodio de Freitas, gentle-mannered but acutely logical, defended the experiments of South Brazil. "We had to find out who suited the soil best, and would live there and multiply. . . . Naturally we brought in Germans, and they are excellent colonists because they remain and fill the country. Of course we admire the English, and

we appreciate all their tremendous work for us, but you know very well that the English always will go home."

Ware backed him up. "Of course, you are right. But remember that most of us don't come here as agricultural settlers, like your colonies of Germans and Scandinavians and Slavs in South Brazil and Argentina. We are mostly merchants, or engineers building railroads, or agents of some big company. . . ."

"Ah, yes! The French and half of the Italians are the same. Always with one foot in the sea, trying to make money to take home."

"Isn't that on account of a feeling that you Brazilians appreciate tremendously—love of one's own country?"

The little parchment face of Custodio softened. "Yes, there is something in what you say. I sympathize with patriotic feeling, naturally. But let me simply consider the question as one concerning only the good of Brazil. We who have land and few people, able and willing to absorb the overflow of half Europe, are inclined to prefer the people who stay with us rather than those who get rich and go. . . . I know very well what you might say: that they have created much more wealth than they take away. There is a great deal in that, too. But the fact remains that we need blood, we must have more people. It's the lack of all the Americas; we have all offered to Europe good land in exchange for strong arms. I don't say that there is any obligation on either side, necessarily, if affection does not exist, but I do know what Brazil wants."

"We don't want mere traders, that's one certain thing," interjected Affonso. "The Portu-

guese petty trader used to be something of a curse, but nowadays he has melted like snow before the Armenian and Syrian. They can bargain anybody out of existence. There is not another trader who can endure where they come. Jews? Dios, no! You don't find Jews traversing the interior waterways: far too fond of their comfort. They are no pioneers. They are city dwellers, and a country like Brazil does not attract them very much until it has been warmed up by a few centuries of other people's lives."

"In New York one man in every three is a Jew," stated the American drummer with solemnity. "Now in Chicago. . . ." He paused to adjust his cigar and John Ware spoke quickly, conciliatory eyes on the Brazilians.

"Your settlers will all be absorbed in a generation, your southerly settlers. But in the hot regions, you don't really expect people to stay. The best any stranger can do for you there is to help to construct. . . ."

"I know! You are right. We don't forget that your countrymen have built, Senhor Ware. We always say that if a cataclysm of heaven were to suddenly remove all the other foreigners, there would be nothing left as a memorial of them but a row of empty shelves in a store; but the English would leave behind them docks and railways."

Max Denis barked with sudden laughter. "Memorials to dead men don't do them much good!"

"Who is dead if his memorial survives?" Custodio was emphatic. "If what the new South American countries really want is population—and I wonder how soon you'll all be regretting your nice clean wide spaces and forests—you have

still got a case for defending your Teutons, even in the hot regions where they make money and go home like everybody else," suggested Denis, acid under his tongue. "They always leave something behind."

"Oh, well. . . ."

He went on, reminiscent: "I've seen them all over the world. Get a girl for a haus-frau, and at the end of six or seven years home they go, taking the boy that looks most like papa for a souvenir. There must be a lot of them in Hamburg. Rough on the women? Lord, no; why? They're not chosen from a stratum where they would lose caste. Isn't that true in Brazil, Senhor Freitas?"

The elder Brazilian acquiesced, his smile a little wry.

"Yes, yes, no doubt."

Denis took a long drink of whisky and soda and was moved to delivery of opinion, nobody else having anything to say. The rain beat on the windows, the steamer churned steadily through heavy seas, and the room was heavy with smoke.

"There's a lot of misery in the world resulting from confused ideas of morality. Women have two chief rôles: that of permanent mistress of a home and that of an agreeable companion, temporary soother. . . ."

"A few million women earn their own living?" suggested Ware. Denis waved away the thought. "Ridiculous! Destruction of society. . . ." taking only a trifle more kindly Affonso's, "Wives can't be agreeable?"

"It's at least not *necessary* that they should be. They have a quite different function. Lots of men, especially mal-educated Englishmen, don't understand that. Lonely in some foreign land, they get

consoled by some girl and think they must marry her—and live miserably in the middle of a family they can't take home, and die of bad rum and regrets. I'm thinking of a case I knew in Java. . . . Or else they live lonely and become cantankerous."

Somebody laughed, but Denis insisted. "Something of that sort is the nightmare of every man who lives in some foreign tropical land where he can't take out a white wife. It's mine too. I am frightened to death that I shall have to work for a fortune until I am fifty and bald, and then I shall fall in love with some minx who will make a fool of me."

"That is interesting as the foreigner's point of view," smiled Custodio de Freitas, and Denis went on quickly:

"When I go back to Geneva next year I shall choose a girl and start the nucleus of a family. I wish I had thought of it ten years ago. She will stay at home and mind the children, and I shall run over every twelve months. Then when I have at last lost all the money I've made in rubber booms on some railway scheme, there'll be a grown-up family to work for me."

"You will have to choose the lady carefully," Salvatore thought. "In case she might not see eye to eye with you while you were being true to her from a distance."

Denis flushed a trifle but stuck to his guns. "Naturally I shall pick out a very well brought-up girl. As to me, I tell you it does not matter. It's of no consequence. Endless misery, endless through all the ages, has come from people being true to each other. It's a mental obstinacy, not a thing of the heart or the body. It's a crime for a man to be true to a woman he is parted from

unless he loves her so much that all other women are colorless shadows. Terrific love is the only excuse for fidelity, bodily fidelity. Without that, faithfulness is very material, a forced faithfulness to a mere pair of arms, when the only thing worth while being true to is an idea, a dream. Be true to a woman you have never kissed, if you like. Glorious! But physical fidelity on account of a tie—very coarse and debasing.”

He rose and went out of the door, followed by laughter.

VI

A FEW days later Margarita, curled in her corner of the library with the dictionary, listened to another heated conversation.

"England," declared Custodio de Freitas, with a sly glance at her, "owes her colonial empire to the habit of drinking tea." He was assailed by Denis: "No, to her abominable climate."

Ware interjected: "I think it's the public schools. The life there is absolutely primitive—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth: and then every boy has it ground into him that he must never put up a bluff that he can't carry through. Never put up a bluff at all, in fact. Priceless lessons in dealing with native races."

Custodio half accepted this. "There is something in what you say, but all the same the tea basis is there too. England has developed those unique schools because she is both sporting and scholarly, and no nation can possess both those qualities without long evenings, and you cannot have long evenings without tea." There was a general laugh at this, but he was serious.

"England claims two-thirds of the great poets of the whole world. Half the philosophers, most of the inventors, and at the same time everybody plays games. Why? Because of the long light evenings in summer, and evenings just as long by the fire in winter, when people really study or talk. That can never occur in hot climates or

steam-heated countries; they have nothing to center about, and no time."

"The day's twenty-four hours long all over the world," said Max Denis.

"Ah, but long evenings don't exist without tea. In lands where nobody drinks tea, we have dinner early at six-thirty or seven, eat such a lot that we are torpid afterwards and fit for nothing but sleep or vaudeville. But the Englishman comes home from his daily work, forgets it, drinks tea, and is ready for three or four hours of some other occupation before he has a big meal. He walks or rides in the country, learns it by heart, loves it. It is the absorbing passion of the Englishman, that love of the very soil learned during those evening walks. I am sure it is for the memory of wild roses or the call of a thrush that the Englishman sacrifices his blood without hesitation, and not for Britain the political entity. . . ."

"Nobody thinks of his country as a political entity," protested Max.

"At least the newspapers talk as if people did. Of course, a great deal of so-called patriotism is either cantankerousness or vanity—nevertheless I am sure that the English love England because of those summer evenings after tea, and that they are scholars because of the fireside. They form ideas and habits that are lifelong."

"I knew a man once in Pernambuco," Denis said, "who managed a sugar plantation. He lived alone for nine years. He dressed every day as if he was a country squire in England, always drank tea at half-past four, kept a diary, had the *Times* sent out to him in weekly batches, and read nothing else. He used to put on evening clothes every night—all by himself, mind."

"Exactly. A man of character formed by tea. Just what I was telling you," Custodio smiled.

"But I think he was an idiot."

"I don't care whether it was sensible or not, but it did show character, and that is the point. Character is, after all, the one rock upon which all nations must build if they are going to last."

Affonso had something to say. "My dear uncle is always worrying himself about the future of the world. But it isn't going to be worth living in if we are going to spend our time taking thought for the morrow. When that morrow comes we shall be dead of some nervous disease or too exhausted to take any pleasure in success. Really, one would make life into a nightmare."

"It is a nightmare, with every nation trying to cut the other's throat for commercial reasons, and being compelled to do it, too. Even they who love peace and beauty and want to live agreeably in the world as it exists."

"I shall choose a desert island," declared Affonso, "when things come to that pitch. We can still keep out of your nightmare of cutthroats on the Amazon."

"No, no, that we can't do!" Max Denis objected. "We live by the outside world now, and if we are having luxurious times it is for some obscure reason of the financial manipulators far away. . . . They could ruin us all, and they may. The Amazon is nothing but a pawn in the hands of a group of determined men thousands of miles distant."

"I don't quite agree with you there," Custodio demurred. "'Something always happens to help the Amazon,' you know. But it is true that everyone must learn to fight, or go down. There's China, for instance."

"Still carving ivory."

"Yes, and wishing to remain a nation of philosophers and embroiderers of exquisite silks. Now what is happening? The whole outside world is working itself up to a state of being terribly shocked and disgusted with China, because she wishes not to be made modern. All the industrial nations are holding up their hands and saying how reprehensible it is that China should have no steel factories. A frightful crime! It is their Christian duty to bring such a scandal to an end."

"They will do it, meu caro. She will be carved up."

"Except perhaps for one thing," Ware suggested. "There are four hundred million Chinese, and they may swallow up everybody who comes along."

"Look at the Japanese, what a difference! They didn't refuse mechanisms; took them to their hearts and copied them. Now everyone's beginning to be afraid, or to say they are, because the Japanese have done just what everybody insisted on their doing. They fear them for the devices they have taught them, hate them for their thrift and industry."

"Are you sure it's that? Not the color line?"

"We Brazilians do not see a color line," said Custodio. "No, I am sure it is not that. It is their offensive virtues. Not their vices. All the objection to them is that they are hard-working, thrifty, don't spend money on drink, and love their own country. . . . All the same, hated or not, you will see that they will be great because they mean to be. As to the nice, agreeable people—lambs for the slaughter!"

"I am a merchant, but I often think that com-

mercialism is a most hateful thing," said Max Denis. "I agree with you in that it is a remorseless fight, much more remorseless than a real field of battle. But it's amusing."

"My point of view is that of the planter, the producer," said Ware. "I don't know much about the market side of things. But it has often struck me what a queer artificial structure has been built up. When one thinks of all the trains and steamers rushing about over the earth and sea, carrying people backwards and forwards with their minds fixed on selling something, the cargo space full of materials dragged from one part of the world to the other . . . for really no very necessary reason."

"Oh, oh, commercial exchange is indispensable."

"Now, yes, but it has all been built up upon invented needs. The world did get along without all these efforts that you and I are making to produce and ship materials. . . . Think of it! Iron from one place, coal and goatskins and diamonds from somewhere else—much of it for the sake of some trader making a profit in imaginary money by persuading people that they want something that they haven't got. They tickle the acquisitive faculty of the world. And here are millions of men and women loading themselves up with rubbish, filling houses with bits of silk and polished wood and glass and silver and delivering up their whole lives to all that collection of dead stuff . . . Half the people on the globe allow themselves to be talked into believing that they must own these things. And what's the truth? All such property is a peg in the foot. A peg, nothing more."

At that moment the tinkle of cups sounded.

Margarita rose, held out her hand to Custodio. "After what you said, you must come and have tea with me," she laughed, knowing well that his gallantry would drive him even to that desperate deed.

That night they saw the Southern Cross lying across a sapphire sky.

VII

ON a brilliant afternoon a few days later Affonso Guimaraes came to Margarita's deck corner. Dressed in shining white, his olive skin and black hair set off to better advantage than in the smothering formal clothes of midwinter Europe, he seemed to be a taller and more assured man. He had something of the proprietor's air about him, too, she thought.

"Do you want to see the Amazon? Here it is, come to meet us," he said. Going with him to the rail, her eyes followed his directing hand. All the sea was changed from its Atlantic transparent gray-blue to a heavy lead color, thickly streaked with turgid yellow.

He explained in his slow, rather studied English: "Here it is, you see, two hundred miles beyond the mouth of the river. The sea, even this immense sea, can do nothing against the heavy Amazon water. There is nothing democratic about our Amazon—it is a conqueror, proud of its golden blood, pushing aside every other thing. In a few hours you will see no more traces of blue seawater; we shall be riding upon the native, intact body of our *rio das Amazonas*."

He kindled visibly as he said it. The air of a proprietor waxed. It was his river, his people's river, and he felt not only that it had made him, but that he had had a hand in making it. It wouldn't have been quite the same thing if it had not belonged to the Brazilians.

She gave him an innocent smile. "It doesn't seem to have much conscience about taking your land away—look, there's a little island just floating past. What a fearful lot of land it must have washed away, to be so muddy!"

He waved a generous hand. "We can spare it. Besides, perhaps it's Peruvian." He took her back to her chair, bent over her hand, and kissed it discreetly.

"More beautiful things go up the river than ever come down," he said. "May you return, if return you will and must, in health and joy."

John Ware, pacing the deck at this sentimental moment, looked coolly at the bent back and met Margarita's eyes without the slightest relaxation of his impassive face. He didn't even pay her the compliment of noticing what she did, she said in her heart, and experienced a feeling of desolation and anger that astonished her. She smiled upon the Brazilian, but answered him at such random thenceforth that he presently left her tactfully. She stared at the ever-yellowing flood that swept the ship's side until Salvatore came panting up the stairs, out of temper after sleeping too long in a hot cabin, to shepherd his flock below to the piano.

"I don't expect you girls can sing a single note decently," he predicted with gloom, "by this time. And I've known more than one good contralto to turn into a rotten soprano in a hot climate. Now, Bianca, there's no excuse for you to sing from your stomach at the end of a trip like this. . . ."

"My sweet husband!" murmured Francina. "Prepare for death, children." But by some accident of fate the out-of-tune instrument and the

voices of the three girls and the young tenor sounded well in those fastidious ears. Soon Salvatore, shouting, playing, singing, conducting, irradiated in smiles.

"You are all glorious! I never heard such lovely tones in my life—not since I left Macdougall Street," he declared. "We shall make some money yet this trip, girls. You see if we don't. We'll skin them. You just keep your head, Bianca, and do what I say. None of your flighty nonsense, now, when you get on shore and meet all these rubber millionaires and politicians that haven't seen a handsome girl like you for six years. . . . You take my advice." An unstable peace descended upon the party.

The *Pomba* docked at crack of dawn next morning and her passengers woke to the sound of rattling winches, finding the vessel already unloading. Crowded against the wharf side, cheek by jowl with two other overseas ships, she was but one of a line of busy shipping edging the water.

The shore, sloping upwards from the wharf's side, swarmed with men of all colors and many races, from blue-black Negro to white Portuguese; most of them were cheerful, olive-skinned mestigos with thick black hair, fine eyes and teeth. Lightly dressed, barefoot, with cotton trousers and shirts open at the neck, streaming with perspiration, they shouted and called with laughter to each other as they worked, now and then yelling and gesticulating with excitement that seemed always to be working up to something that never happened.

A glaring sun soon flooded the yellow river, spread a haze over the line of green opposite the

city, and touched the gray-colored roofs. Heat, damp and heavy, descended like a palpable thing. Salvatore went ashore as quickly as he could to try to learn news of the *Italia*, but returned with no tidings. She had not arrived. He was inclined to be gloomy about it: "It would be my luck if she went to the bottom of the Atlantic, and all that good money I spent on those girls wasted," he sighed, but, femininely soothed, presently recovered and consented to go sight-seeing ashore with his womenfolk.

Most of the *Pomba's* passengers were going to Manáos, but like everyone who touches at a tropic port after long voyaging, they were eager to get out into the sunshine and to pace solid pavements. Before eight o'clock the carriages and automobiles plying near the docks had swept every passenger into the city.

Margarita found herself sitting with her sister and John Ware in a smart car, that, turning from the dock, mounted a steep incline and presently emerged into a well-asphalted straight street. She had an impression, as they approached one of the plazas, of extraordinary deep greenness. A mass of verdure stood high and deep, no tamed garden but rather a slice of overbearing forest. Tall palms with pillared trunks and fantastic, enormous green hands extended stiffly rose above massive trees crowded with glossy foliage. Through the maze of green could be seen gnarled, ancient boles with bright tufts of air plants and orchids swarming in every crevice. Long ropes of lianes hung with their wide leaves curiously motionless in the heavy damp air. Strong masses of lush tropical plants grew among the knotted roots; the whole

garden dripped and exuded moisture, sweltering in strangled green.

Beside this park they stopped, to enter the hotel for breakfast. The theatre, just opposite, was proudly pointed out, a valiant erection seen through the screen of trees. Inside a cool white room, whose long doors stood open to the pavement, they sat at a round table and received the discreet glances of half a dozen white-clad men who drank tiny cups of black coffee.

"We are still under the spell of the English breakfast," said Ware, ordering eggs *ao prato* and guava paste. "It fades under Amazonian heat. I revert to South American food customs directly I see palm trees and so will you. . . . Before you know where you are, Antonelli, you'll be getting up at five in the morning, drinking black coffee, doing a good four or five hours' work, and eating a seven-course meal at eleven o'clock."

"Heaven forbid!" Salvatore, preoccupied, refused to go sight-seeing with his womenfolk. Gladly abandoning them to the two Brazilians and Ware, he mapped out a strenuous morning in the theatre and the inner offices of the wealthy. The rest of his party presently drove off, heading first for the older part of the water front. The sun appeared to be mounting with extraordinary rapidity, sending violent showers of light into the pale streets.

"I want you to see our market on the Ver-o-peso before the other sights," Custodio said. "The botanical gardens and the pottery in the museum can wait. You can see labelled pots and arranged plants in any part of the world. But here is something vital—something of the genuine, everyday life of our people."

They drove down again to the waterside, this time to the cut made for the accommodation of the small craft, the *embarcacoes*, that not only performed the continuous traffic of the riverine network, but were the habitations of a thousand families. Against the edge of the canal were moored scores of jostling boats, with others plying up and down with busy paddles or skimming along with bright-colored sails hoisted. They had this in common: all were home-made, whether narrow dugouts and canoes of the up-river people with Indian blood in their veins, or the more ambitiously contrived boats with a cover, the *toldo*, for shelter against sun and rain, or stout craft constructed for traversing the rapids of the interior waterways, covered at either end, as solid as Noah's ark. The crowd of sails, rust-red and verdigris-blue, made the river as lively as the Gulf of Venice.

On the edge of the cut the market folk were buying from the river traders—bananas, bundles of herbs and medicinal roots, turtle oil, small quantities of rubber, dried fish and cacao beans. Facing the water front, across the street, were scores of one-storied shops that in turn stocked the river traders. Inside, the shelves were stuffed with canned fruits and meats, flour and tobacco; outside were piles of cotton hammocks, coverlets, coarse straw native hats, rope sandals, and ready-made shirts. A continuous noise of good-humored chaffering rose into the sunny air, men and women exchanging news and comradely pleasantries.

This region, set aside for petty commerce, with its public scales so that people can "see-the-weight," probably did not in a whole week involve the turnover of as much money as was made by

any of the big rubber merchants in the business section of Pará in a day, but here was the genuine life, the real industry, of the Amazonian dwellers. Simply philosophic, devoted to the lives that they live in eternal contact with the river and the forest, a free and masterless folk.

The sun was high, pouring floods of heavy heat into the stony business section, as they went through the long ruas and travessas of Pará, straight streets laid out at right angles to each other. The newcomers read the names of little stores—A Paris n'America, A Africana, and A Formosa Paraense, and made obeisance on first introduction to the *ouro preto* of the Amazon.

Here it lay, this famous black gold, piles of big balls on the pavement and inside the doors of long warehouses. Some of the balls were cut in half, showing the creamy hearts close-packed with layers like great unopened roses.

“The buyer cuts them open to see what the quality is, and how many bits of wood and old iron the seringueiro has put in to make his pelle weigh more,” somebody explained. They drove to the outskirts of the city, passing again the Theatro da Paz, along the Avenida de Nazareth with its great dark green spreading mangoes meeting overhead, the fruit hanging on long strings like decorations on a Christmas tree. Following the Souza car line, they ran out along a green wide road, with heavy grass and tropic weeds springing between the rails. Rose-colored mimosas ran over the paths, and thick-leaved lilies sprang at the borders of the ditches where bright, light-green woods stood. The elaborate houses of rich merchants rose here and there, but between and behind them the dripping green forest crept

up and crowded. The whole region was heavy with the breath of the forest. Green vistas overwhelmed the lane openings, a faint blue mist hanging over everything.

Far out lay the big new market where sacks of tapioca and piles of palm cabbages stood side by side with mounds of dried shrimps; they stopped at the Bosque and saw the blue-black back of the melancholy cowfish in the pool, went on to the museum, standing in its lush, thick green gardens full of tremendous struggling tropic trees and plants, stared at the strange beasts and the brilliant birds of the Amazon, and glanced at the rooms where funeral urns and poor little household pots of dead and forgotten tribes sat forlornly on shelves, docketed and registered.

Margarita was fairly willing to be instructed, or at least was not openly restive, but Francina and Beatriz, frankly bored by museums, ended by refusing to look at the Indian pottery. "They have been dead such a long time, and I am alive, and I hate to think of dying and being put in a clay jar," Francina said. She bought bundles of the labyrinthine lace from the tiny shops in narrow, crowded streets of the older quarter, and here her interest in Pará ended. Returning to the Grande Hotel for lunch, they found Salvatore waiting. He had spent a happy morning.

"I could make a heap of money here if I can only get the girls safely away from Manáos," he declared. "I shall lock them up and chain them down."

John Ware joined their table, immaculate in his white clothes, his fair coolness accentuated by the dazzling heat. It seemed to Margarita that he was a little absent-minded, and she reproached

him for this without getting more than a long, keen look from him in reply. As the shores of Brazil were approached he had almost ostentatiously left her to the new environment, and now she could not resist the idea that he was expecting a sea change to take place in her, and was looking on at the process with detached amusement.

In the middle of almoço, three people entered the room amid quite a flutter of excitement among the waiters; many heads were turned to look at the party. An old lady, upright, dignified, dressed in black, was followed by a beautiful young girl in white. She appeared to be about eighteen, and looked like a *bisque china* doll, with enormous dark eyes fringed with long lashes; her oval face was covered in powder. Behind them came a tall man with a slight stoop, acknowledging salutes as men rose and bowed here and there from the tables.

"Evaristo da Cunha, the deputy governor of Amazonas," Ware said to Margarita, and Custodio and Affonso, excusing themselves quickly, went to exchange a word with their cousin. "The girl? I don't know. One of the family, of course. I don't know the old lady, either—one almost never sees the women, you know, except now and again at functions, and then they are all made up to look just alike."

Max Denis, sitting beyond Affonso's chair, followed the young girl with bright eyes, his bleached face alight. "Just out of a convent, or she wouldn't look so assured and sophisticated," he said. "Oh, how I love these veiled girls! Flowers grown under a glass shade, innocent as a snow-drop, and not a thing in the whole world that they don't know. Adorable!"

Custodio and Affonso returned. "Our cousins hope to make your acquaintance after lunch, with your permission," the older man said formally to Francina. "Evaristo came here to escort our aunt, Madame de Freitas, back to Manáos. She is just returning from Rio with her granddaughter, who has spent the last two years in a French convent there."

Max glanced at Ware with a "What did I tell you?" expression, and Francina permitted herself a discreet glance in the direction of the deputy governor and his party. She met a look that sent a thrill of excitement through her, a look from sombre eyes that were sleepy and yet brilliant, instantly withdrawn after the first second of encounter. It was as if two expert swordsmen had momentarily crossed weapons.

Evaristo da Cunha was at that time a man of forty-six. He had a shock of thick gray hair, plumed above an oval face; his skin was very white, and there was no color on his still face but the black of his eyebrows, the long line of his dark eyes, and the curves of his beautifully shaped lips. He was always fastidiously dressed, and, rather an exception in that land of jewels, wore no pin in his tie and no ring upon his long ivory hands. He cultivated an atmosphere of mysterious elegance, and was rather a silent man, affecting a constant, very slight, smile upon his closed lips in lieu of conversation.

Custodio bent towards her. "What do you think of our politician?"

Francina laughed. "A fascinating creature! How I should enjoy a flirtation with him—in public."

"*Cuidado, madame! Take care!*"

"I said in public. It's delicious dancing on volcanoes."

"I warn you! Our Evaristo isn't a volcano. He is a born gamester whose one instinct is to win. That's why he is such a good politician to follow . . . but with him it's a game because he craves power, acquisition, money—all that the game will give him. He lives often for long periods, but only temporarily, the life of an ascetic, and yet he loves money, will do anything for money because it's a tool. He makes his plans for money as if he were hungry for it, and yet he really only uses it for one thing."

She laughed. "Yes? What?"

"The man who is avid for money is nearly always avid for flesh."

"You are very frank."

"Are you angry? I am very sorry. . . . It is because you are so clever, madame. Please let me say! I admire you and your sister so much, I take it as a personal compliment that two such distinguished young women should come to visit us . . ." he said as she rose, and went on, accompanying her to the door: "If your party from Italy is not delayed, we shall have the pleasure of ascending the river with you."

"That will be delightful." She smiled upon him as they stood in the lobby.

He continued: "I am very much attached to our friend Mr. Ware. I suppose you know that he is associated with my family estates up above Manáos—he is very serious and hard-working, and is helping to reform a very poor *seringal*—piece of rubber forest, you know. He has an interest in it; he is an admirable fellow. Patient, accurate, very sincere."

She yawned very slightly. "Yes, he has all the virtues of the Englishman."

"Women—appreciate—those virtues, *nào è?*"

"Some women, no doubt. I don't know if I do. You see, all that such a man wants is a peg to hang his niceness on. Perhaps it's what most men want. But to be the peg——" She stopped as Evaristo, his aunt upon his arm, approached them. Margarita, talking to the girl, the serene Leona, followed, Affonso in attendance. A few minutes of courtesies supervened, and then Francina went upstairs to sleep, while Margarita capitulated to Custodio's offer of "The last sight I shall trouble your eyes with in Pará, mademoiselle. But this I wish you to see. I will come for you at five o'clock, when it is not so hot and there is still an hour's light."

Late in the afternoon therefore Margarita went with him to a quiet square down in the older part of the city, where deep, cool blue shadows lay on one entire side, and feathery trees grew in a sleeping garden. At one side stood a worn old building, inscribed: "*Hospital do Senhor Bom Jesus.*" Tattered cotton clothes hung on the bars of its window spaces. Outside was an overflow of people for whom there was no room. A cart, full of tragic bundles and remnants of house furniture, contained all their possessions; a couple of dogs slept in the sun. Sitting on the edge of the pavement, some half asleep, others staring into vacancy, were a score or more of men, women and children, the *retirantes*, the *flagellados*, withdrawn and scourged folk from the drought regions of Ceará.

"On this misery has been built the rubber industry of the Amazon," said Custodio.

They had the appearance of people from whom

almost the last drop of blood had been sucked. The hollow-eyed and listless women; gaunt men, with fevered lips and all the bones of their cheeks showing through the stretched skin; little limp children with arms and legs like pale sticks. They did not speak, but sat uncomplaining, their heads bowed. Several of the children were very fair, inheritors of the Dutch strain that has run through North Brazil since the day of Maurice of Nassau.

Margarita, distressed, could scarcely bear to leave them. Couldn't something be done? Food or money . . . ?

"Not from you or me," said Custodio. "They would resent it. They are very proud and independent. All these people were small landowners, and will be again, probably, if they can tide the bad times over. The State governments are doing all that can be done for them, transporting them from the burnt lands to some place where they can work. Ah, that drought country!"

They walked slowly from the square. "When no rain falls in Ceará, then all the ground opens in cracks, the beds of the rivers dry up and the crops are scorched in the iron ground and the cattle die and the people become living skeletons like these, then they come to the Amazon. Here at least is plenty of water—too much! They go to work in the deep rubber forests. All the men, and sometimes all the family, go into the forest and start tapping in some great seringal. Without them, without the spur of the droughts, we should never have enough labor on the Amazon."

"They look very sad and ill," she murmured, much troubled.

"Often, they die. Others rouse up and live. Then when the rains come in Ceará and the

scourged country blossoms like a magic garden, and such crops spring up that anyone can get rich in a year, then back they go. Ah, senhora, Brazil wears many masks . . .”

Late that afternoon Salvatore, spending much time anxiously at the wharf, heard that the *Italia* had been sighted. She docked before midnight, and he went on board at once, returning an hour later to waken Francina with lamentations mingled with satisfaction. Only four girls had come, with Beatriz Sforzi, five musicians, and Laroche, but these four were very pretty indeed, and six more were to follow on the next boat. “He ought to have waited for them,” he declared, but tried to console himself with assurances that an agent in Italy had solemnly sworn to put the selected beauties on board.

Next morning he was down at the dock before the sun was up and overrode all grumblings of the girls and the waspish Sforzi, insisting upon transferring them at once to the *Pomba*, due to proceed up the river that day.

“I dare not let those girls loose in Pará,” he declared to Laroche. “I know more now than I did. They would be simply burgled, stolen, torn from me. I could never face Manáos! Aren’t they paying for them? . . . Don’t tell me; I don’t care what they say. I shall tell them the plague’s raging, or there’s a revolution or something. But not one of them shall set foot ashore.”

In a couple of hours he had them transferred, but presently Francina intervened. It was bad business to make them sulky at the outset, she was sure. At least let her take them for an automobile drive. She had her way, and packed the whole of

the company into three cars. Making concessions to the fears of Salvatore, they went through the city streets at top speed, and as soon as this parade had been made for form's sake they turned away for the long spin to Chapeo Verado. That was pretty safe! But Salvatore knew no peace until he saw the whole of his party back upon the decks of the *Pomba*, retaining his anxious expression until that gallant ship weighed anchor, edged herself from the crowd of shipping at the water's edge, and began to skirt the southern edge of Marajó Island on her way to the Amazon's great channel.

At this time of the year there should have been daily rains, but there had been an extraordinarily long dry season that still did not break except in fitful showers. The waters had only risen a few feet, and sandbanks still showed in long lines of pale gold at the edge of the green islands. All the water paths were lively with little steamers and riverine craft.

Francina, leaning over the rail of the captain's little deck in the shadow of an awning, just before dinner, perceived the approach of a white-clad man. Evaristo, the perpetual little smile upon his lips, came close, stood very near; he bowed low, asked her consent to his remaining at her side, and then leaned beside her without speaking for a moment. There was no one in sight. She remained with her elbows supporting her little chin, glancing indifferently at the water and the thick trees by which the boat pressed. The deputy governor spoke in a low and measured voice.

"When I saw you first, something—some spark—passed between us. I felt it."

"You must not say that to me," she said in a

surprised and distant manner. He took no notice.

"I have been thinking of you all night," he said, still in his low, intent voice. "Look at me! I implore you, look at me!"

She raised eyes of incredible innocence to him, and he drew in his breath sharply. She looked away again as his eyes sank into hers, turning her face so that he could see only the outline of her round cheek and the burnished curves of her fair hair. To that averted cheek she raised one slim forefinger, and remained motionless, her loose sleeve slipping from her arm, pearly in the half light. Evaristo glanced quickly about, saw no other person, and bent his head until his lips touched that tempting arm.

As he kissed, with gentle and silent kisses, he kept his eyes steadily upon her averted face. She made no sign, apparently unheeding, until he, perhaps a shade disconcerted by what he felt to be her elaborated unconcern, forced the pace with a whispered "I adore you! You are the most exquisite woman I have ever seen! I adore you!"

At this she withdrew her arm, starting, and cast a wondering look upon him. In the same moment Margarita's big white hat appeared as she ascended the stairway. Evaristo immediately bowed very low and went away without uttering another sound.

"The great man is extremely romantic looking," Margarita thought, staring after him frankly. "He rather looked as if he was being sentimental."

"He was." Francina was quite calm. "What else should he be doing, if he couldn't talk politics? . . . Since he's in good health. . . ." She laughed and resumed thoughtfully: "Latins,

Margie, are the only sort of men on earth who should be allowed by law to make love. They are so adept and so practical at the same time. They are not really sentimental at heart about women, and they don't invent qualities for us. . . . Thank Heaven, too, they don't want us for intellectual companions, nor as pegs to hang their own virtues on. Do you want to be a peg, Margie?"

"I seem to be hearing a lot about them," the girl remarked. "Property's a peg in your foot—and women are pegs for sentimentalities?"

"Y-yes. Perhaps because they're property too. . . ." Francina's brow was knitted. "A vexed question, my darling, the true sphere of woman. I like planes better than spheres. . . . They could go to the moon. Oh, let's hurry! There's the dinner bell."

VIII

WITH the Narrows threaded, they looked out next morning upon an immense waste of waters, golden in the sunlight, flecked with blue shadows; they were upon the breast of the Amazon itself, their faces turned westwards. Along the northern shore, above and far behind the dead level line of dark forest, rose a series of flat-topped ridges, cut out in flat blue against the lighter sky. Near at hand, on the southern shore where the *Pomba* made her way to avoid the racing current of mid-river, the forest was close enough now and again to permit a sight of little fairy palms, their feet in the yellow flood, or the long strings of flowering vines that hung, looping from branch to branch of the tall, naked-stemmed trees and tangling the thick shrubs that grew on the margin.

The steamer often passed close to a dwelling of the river folk, setting the slim canoe, the family's sole means of communication with the outer world, dancing against the mooring post. The river huts, confiding themselves to the water rather than to the forest, rose out of the Amazon on six stout wooden legs, high enough to keep the floor out of reach of the river's rises. Built of wood and palm thatch, the house was waterproof, airy and cool.

Its mistress, seen leaning from the window space, dressed in a bright cotton garment, must have little enough to do, you might think. She had but one floor to sweep and no beds to make,

since the family slept in the hammocks suspended from corner to corner. Food came chiefly from the river itself, and into the river went anything that she wanted to throw away. Cooking could not be complicated, since the fire was but a pan of charcoal, and the meals had little more variety than that offered by different sorts of fish, accompanied by the eternal *farinha de mandioca*. A bit of dried beef, the beloved *carne secca*, on rare occasions, a handful of peppers, black beans, a few bananas, a little coffee or cacao, made up almost the only changes of menu.

The forest that walled in these river dwellers at the back, that reared itself overhead and wove tangles of thorny creepers against their entry, was less friendly, less productive, than the river at their feet. There was the main harvest, the highway linking them to the world. Looking out from the little frail hut, they saw their only known universe go by; secure because no one would dispute this desolation with them, they were consciously proud of their independence, as proud as Arabs, with the yellow river sea as their desert.

Margarita looked down at the scene upon the lower deck, crowded with hundreds of *flagellados*. She regarded them with a feeling that she was committing an impertinence, but was reassured at sight of their calm and dignified candor. The hammocks, swung in tiers one above the other, were for the most part left in place day and night, since they were the only retreats where the greater number of the Cearenses could sit and rest. The women spent most of their time in preparing meals, washing or dressing themselves or their children, eating, and combing their hair. The men talked, smoked, played their violas and

sang little gay songs. There was a continual sound of laughter and lively talk, a pervading comradeship and good humor.

The scent of strong black coffee rose into the air, and, as she looked down, Margarita saw a thickset young man carrying a cup of coffee to a hammock just beneath the spot where she stood. The hammock was a beautiful white Ceará specimen, the sides edged with heavy lace, adorned with huge tassels; from its deep folds a slender arm, the color of old ivory, was extended, and a young woman, her head bound with a white handkerchief, raised herself.

Her face was pale; long eyelashes shaded her eyes as if she was too tired or indifferent to keep them open; thick dusky hair was parted over her low forehead. She was very pretty. As she stirred, a cry came from the folds of the hammock and Margarita saw that she held a baby to her breast.

The young man, murmuring gentle words, bent over her, took the child and held it to his broad face with an air of rapture. He lifted its tiny hands and kissed each feeble finger deliberately, with an emphasis of love so passionate, so nearly ecstatic, that Margarita turned away her eyes, feeling shame in looking. She was about to leave the rail when she caught sight of a little child, perhaps two or three years old, a very fair little child, who ran to the hammock and cried out in a shrill, imperious treble. At once the face of the man underwent a peculiar change; the radiance died as if a candle had been snuffed out suddenly, leaving it like wood. He was nothing now but a stolid Indian with a yellow skin and small flat black eyes.

The girl in the hammock spoke, stretching out

her delicate hand, and he, apparently obeying, set the baby down on the deck, took away the cup, and then lifted into the hammock the tiny girl who still stood calling out, as she braced herself by the heavy fringe.

Ware came up behind Margarita. "What do you think of our labor recruits?"

She retorted: "I don't see them as labor recruits. I see crowds of people all living together, packed like sardines, and being polite and good-tempered about it."

He, too, looked down, and immediately exclaimed: "Good heavens, there's Vicente! What an extraordinary thing! That caboclo, that half-Indian chap—the very best man I ever had working for me on the river——" Leaning over the rail, his voice or gesture caught the eye of the young man below. He looked up and his face broke into a broad, beaming smile. He took off his straw hat and held it against his breast as he bowed: "Patrao!"

"If you'll pardon me, I must go down and speak to him," said Ware, and ran down the ladder to the lower deck. Margarita saw him take Vicente aside, shake his hand; the two remained talking quickly for a few minutes. Then they came forward to the hammock and Ware saluted the girl with courteous kindness, patting the heads of the children. Margarita, returning to her deck chair, encountered Madame de Freitas.

"What have you seen?" inquired that lady, shrewd eyes looking out from a hundred wrinkles.

"I think, a man who loves—if that is not too absurd. Do Brazilians love very much?"

The old lady laughed. "Yes, it is quite common. This is still a land where there are more men than

women, and the rare is always prized. What do you say, Custodio? Do you spoil our Brazilian women?" He drew his chair towards them and answered slowly:

"Spoil? No. We give them everything, steal and kill for them, ruin ourselves if they are exigent or flighty. But they remain the same. Spoiled, no."

"It is said that you don't trust them very much?" Margarita suggested.

"Perhaps. . . . I think there is always a little *desconfiança*. A woman is a delicate flower. Our houses, too, are still our castles, charmed circles, almost a walled sanctity, not easily penetrated."

"Alas! in the southern cities, Rio and Sao Paulo, it is not quite the same now . . . too much wealth. And then, perhaps, the example of foreigners," the old lady regretted.

"I think it's the result of having good paving and trains and telephones," Custodio argued. "When women only went out in carriages over streets impassable with mud things were different; but now they are beginning to jump into street cars and run all about the town every day."

"I do not like it," Madame de Freitas said. "I prefer the position of our women as it is."

Denis, approaching, had something to say. "At least it's very convenient for the men. It leaves them free to spend all their nights at the clubs and their days in the cafés."

"Does my wife object to that if I do?" demanded Custodio. "She would not care to accompany me. She has her occupations, and emphatically they are not mine—care of her children, her house, her clothes. She spends hours every day over her dressmaker and making her sweets."

Does she wish me to help her? She prefers the society of her cousins and aunts and children."

"An excellent theory for men: I support it heartily!" Denis said, and Madame de Freitas, experienced, shrewdly frank, agreed. "As a woman, my opinion is the same. It is much better for a *casal*, a married couple, not to see too much of each other, not to invade each other's spheres. What happens in countries where men and women are constantly together, in business and amusement? They have no children, and then they are always divorcing each other. No wonder! There is no charm left, they have no ties, and no home—nothing that can be regarded as sacred even if couples are no longer madly in love." She sat up and emphasized her point with her tiny hands.

"This companionship before marriage, too, what a frightful mistake! How can a man think of a woman as a closed garden of mysteries if he has run about with her for months and years, and seen her running about with a dozen other young men! Horrible! All my granddaughters are being brought up in convents, and when they are old enough and pretty enough to marry, I take them out one by one, exhibit just the tips of their noses to an eligible young man, and marry them off without the delay of a week."

"You are a believer in harems, madame?" Denis said deferentially.

"But certainly! Where else do women rule?"

"They have insisted on getting outside them?"

Custodio intervened: "Not voluntarily. They may not know it, but be sure that they have been driven out by economic necessity—or curiosity." He looked with a smile at Margarita. She retorted impudently:

"Curiosity about—you?"

"Would that it were, mademoiselle!" He bowed low.

"Oh, but I *am* curious! I think I should like a Brazilian husband myself, Madame de Freitas recommends them so highly."

The old lady's wrinkles creased deeply as she laughed. "That is delightful! I hope you will let us all remember that. . . . My dear, the Brazilian is very easy to understand. I shall explain him to you, and Custodio, do not dare to contradict me! Before marriage, he is a suppliant, an adorer of the remote and beautiful. Afterwards, of course, his feelings change a little. Any woman of intelligence adapts herself to that—it is a logical alteration. . . . Then, if she bears children, his attitude becomes tender, there is no foolishness he will not forgive her——"

"That is because Brazilians carry child worship to extremes," Custodio declared. But she would not have this.

"No, no! Our Brazilians adore their children, but the feeling of the husband is not gratitude to the mother of his babies. It is something other than that. I have often thought about this since I became an old woman and able to regard my family and friends with detachment."

She looked keenly at the group before her and challenged Denis with old, bright eyes. "I think that our men, like the French, become maternal to their women when there are children. Not husbandly or even paternal, but motherly. In a manner, they seem to identify themselves with nature: they have helped to create a real woman, brought her to fulfillment."

Francina, coming quietly to them, leaning upon her sister's chair, uttered a little sound under cover of the laughter and protests. "Dios meu!" she murmured, "The True Sphere of Woman again! It is intolerable."

Custodio was standing up, emphatic. "Oh, beloved aunt of mine, you credit us poor men with feelings too intricate, I fear. I wish we could lay claim to such rarified emotions. I do not deny that we are foolish about our families, but our great madness for children is due, I am convinced, to the tremendous need we have of them. Each healthy child is a national asset."

Madame de Freitas interrupted. "Ah, Custodio! Now it is you who are fantastic! No man is so patriotic that he rejoices in his sons as gifts to the government."

"Not consciously. You said just now, though, that the rare are always prized——"

"Rare! My sister in Santos has eighteen children!"

"—The country is so immense and we are so few, comparatively. We are not enough to plant our own corn and beans. We have to send out into the world and beg immigrants to come, paying their way from Europe and asking them to lend us their heads and hands."

"That needn't worry you," shrugged Denis. "All of the Americas are in the same boat. Trying to create a permanent white population with imported blood in a territory that bred an aboriginal race with skins of a color that should be a standing lesson and a warning." He lowered his voice as he ended, but the old lady was not offended.

"You know very well, senhor, that our Portuguese ancestors did not make any mistake about that," she reminded him coolly. "The clever old Jesuits were aware that the only chance for a permanent population was mixture with our Indians . . . we are all proud of that blood."

Custodio went back to his point. "Yes, and that's why we absorb the African, down on the Bahia coast. We have managed to avoid a color question while we acquired a population that can resist the climate."

"Ah, race questions! What an infinity of bitterness——!"

"There needn't and shouldn't be any in the Americas, of all countries, where the real native is relegated to extinction and we are all intruders——"

"Benefactors," interpolated Denis slily.

"Perhaps. But at least we should recognize the fact that tropical and subtropical lands in such a light zone as most of the Americas can't support a permanent blonde race. They die out. Without the constant inflow of invigorating blood you get sterility and degeneracy in a few generations. The only alternative is mixture with a colored race. The Asiatic can survive here, probably. . . . But pure fruit from a European tree, never! Mentally, it is true, we are heirs of Greece and Rome and modern western Europe——"

Denis got up and bowed to Madame de Freitas as he moved away. "Brazil," he remarked, "can at least make one remarkable claim. She is the one American country that doesn't revile her European mother. . . . Look at the black water! We must be getting near Santarem."

That night a pall of heat smothered the boat. She panted, churning her way against the current, seeming to fight the heavy air as well as the water. Stars glimmered feebly through a mantle of black velvet. The line of forest was a vaguely darker blur. As if stimulated by the oppressive atmosphere and the suffocating dark, the "scourged folk" of the lower deck cleared a space among the hammocks and sang and danced. Sleep, perhaps, was an impossible thing.

Margarita stood, young Guimaraes by her side, and looked down upon that curious scene. Ship's lanterns threw violent shadows, and dark faces, glistening with perspiration, smiling with flashes of white teeth, came and went as groups shuffled and swayed in the posturing dances. A dozen men strummed the wailing violas: and from every side, from every mouth, rose the syncopated, pulsating song, steeped in African magic.

When an interval came and the dancers subsided, breathless, the provocative tune continued. Suddenly two slim and tall boys jumped into the flickering circle of light and began to dance, their lithe bodies swaying from the hips. The haunting, melancholy beat of ancient music throbbed into the breathless night. The young men danced until they fell aside, and some one began to sing.

"That's the 'Matuto de Ceará,' " Custodio said. "You notice that everybody knows the words—even my foreign-educated nephew here!" He smiled ironically at Affonso Guimaraes, bending over the rail with alight face, and translated rapidly to the girls. "Ah, now listen! That's the immortal, the eternal song of the drought country, this one! Please listen!"

A dark girl stood up, full-breasted, black crinkled hair on either side of a vivid face. She sang sweetly and clearly:

*"O meu boi morreu!
Que será de mim!
—Manda busca outro,
Lá no Piauí!"*

"You hear it? 'My cow died! What will become of me? Go and seek another, over there in Piauí'—where the drought does not come," Margarita heard someone tell her. As in a dream she watched the shining, laughing, tragic faces. Somebody, playing a guitar cleverly, stood up and sang as he played, his challenging voice sent to one side and another as he bent from the hips.

"When a black man dies, they say the drink killed him. But when a white man dies, it is because God has called him. . . . Whenever you see a white man eating with a Negro, either the white man is in his debt, or the food belongs to the black man." Custodio translated rapidly, and added as the song ended with a burst of applause and laughter: "All the people of the middle North have been makers of sarcastic couplets since the days of Gregorio de Mattos . . . and you see many of us are frankly pro-Negro. We owe those folk so much!" He looked down at the crowded, sweltering deck below and went on speaking quietly to Margarita.

"Laughter has saved the African from a broken heart and extinction. Laughter and the gift of bold loving. . . . Belief in a good God, and an easy faculty of loyalty to the thing near at hand. Those African slaves whom we dragged away and outraged, how they have influenced us! They have given us so much more than the Indians who with-

drew themselves from the Portuguese conqueror." The beat of the music ascended, provocative, crying to all the senses like a live thing.

The Brazilian looked down, his keen, withered face alert. "You see what a social instinct those people have—they did not learn that from the Indian. Our natives won't leave the forest, won't work for wages under a roof, won't accept any conditions. But the Negro loves his fellow man, fears loneliness and the deep forest, identifies himself with us. A generation ago they were slaves, nursing our children; to-day they write our poetry and sit in the national assembly——"

"If we had a thousand Rondons," Affonso interjected, "we might see the Indian there too. And then we might know what he thinks. . . . Ah, listen to that! There's a true Indian folk song."

Below, the circle of absorbed faces turned to the cleared space in the center where a couple began to go through a series of intricate steps. A voice sang:

"O little frog of the river margin!"

and response came in the next phrase:

"Don't throw me in the water! I should die of cold."

"O little frog, what are you doing in there?"

—"Putting on my stockings for my wedding."

"O little frog, are you about to marry?"

—"Yes, to have my own wife to give me joy."

Margarita wanted to know what they were drinking from the little painted cups. Native rum, Custodio told her.

"Cachaca, very new and strong. If those heads below were not dizzy with songs there might be some quarreling. But they'll probably go to sleep

without the least trouble. Our people are always very courteous and gentle with each other unless some girl makes trouble. There really is no other cause for violence in Brazil."

Francina turned to Evaristo, standing silent by her side, his face pale in the half light, his eyes withdrawn. She murmured to him: "All the Brazilians except you are keeping time, singing the songs, looking as if they were inclined to go down and dance too. You don't dance? You don't sing?"

He answered, smiling: "No, and I never drink, and I only smoke one cigar a day."

She laughed lightly. "What a rigid life! How—how—uncompromising."

He bent so that his lips nearly touched her neck. "No. Not that. But the fact is that I have no *small* vices. And my big vices are so immense that they have become—could become—virtues."

IX

RAIN poured down in ceaseless torrents next morning.

The river rolled in long and sullen lines, mud-colored. A miasmie chill hung over the water, and the plugging steamer was comfortless, damp all through in a kind of cold perspiration. The waiters shivered as they flitted about, little cups of black coffee in their hands, their frail cotton shirts pinned together at the neck. Nobody sang or laughed or even talked out loud, and even the pack of immigrants on the lower deck shrank into their hammocks and were silent.

The forest retreated on either side, hiding itself in the haze of rain until it was nothing but a slightly darker shade against the soft tone of the sky and tawny river. The huts of the water people were without a sign of life. Salvatore, turning his back upon the weather, rehearsed his company remorselessly, taking them rapidly through "Bohème" and "Rigoletto" and "Tosca." Only two of the four chorus girls could sing with any approach to precision, but the beauty of the quartet was undeniable and of such an agreeable quality that Salvatore did not concern himself greatly about their usefulness as more than ornaments. He chaffed them jovially, permitting a red-haired little marionette, Giulia, to pat his hand and arrange his mane, winking over her shoulder to his unperturbed Francina.

"I am being tactful with them," he said during one breathing spell, in a stage whisper to Ware. "Who knows! They might make so much money on the Amazon that they will all go back to Italy and marry dukes."

Later in the day the rain ceased, the sun shone, and a magic change came upon the river. The forest steamed, the sky was blue, the boat sped gaily. Where breaks occurred in the green ranks, and the trees stood back, cattle strayed and grazed in emerald clearings. Patches of maize and sugar cane stood beside any thatched dwelling, the rags of light-green bananas hung above. Often, tiny inlets ran into these fields, rushes and bright flowering plants grew as beside any brook of the temperate zone, and the spikes of water hyacinth rocked on their floats of glossy leaves.

Many little boats traversed these waters, some with sails, with a covered end where the family dwelt, for the Amazon is an eternal field of abundance for the needy of North Brazil. If cotton crops fail, if cacao trees become blighted or debts cannot be paid, there is always the river as refuge for a season. A boat, a sack of beans and flour, and perhaps a few cheap articles of exchange . . . then the family moves from point to point of the upper waters, fishing, helping with cocoa harvests, going to the sandbanks in the season for turtles' eggs, lending a hand with forest clearing or nut gathering or hunting in the higher reaches for the trees that yield the caucho rubber.

The *Pomba* passed Obidos in another deluge of rain. The passengers on the upper deck sat together talking and reading, rather miserable with the depression that invades tropical regions

directly the skies are overcast. The Cearenses huddled under the sagging awning, silent except when some courageous spirit tinkled his guitar, enduring the discomfort of the rains with the same grim patience that bore them through the terrors of the drought. They did not fight; they endured.

Custodio, watching the procession of the veiled forest, said that it "always gave him a curious sensation of receiving a challenge" whenever he returned to the Amazon after an absence.

"And nearly always, as now, we carry a variety of foreign races upon the comfortable upper deck, but below the space is filled with the impoverished Brazilian-born."

"You are an Amazonense?" Margarita reminded him, smiling.

"Yes, I am a native of the river too, but I cannot get it out of my head that we are all adventurers, just as much so to-day as when centuries ago brave men came gold-hunting, hunting for this very place to which you are going—you realize that? Manáos, you know, is named after the Indian tribe for whose Lake Manoa so many men struggled and died, searching vainly. This is the real home of the Dorado! And how many have found their precious gold here!"

Salvatore thought this promising, and said so, laughing.

"Yes, but I cannot resist the impression that we are all rather bold, imposing ourselves upon this immensity of river and forests; and that all that great nature knows well that it can reconquer again, destroy us, some day."

Denis interfered.

"Well, we can all go away. What do we work for, here in the tropics? Generally, to get enough money to go away."

"You don't really mean that, that the forest will blot everything out again? I don't think you do!" Salvatore remonstrated. "Surely science has done so much? There isn't any yellow fever now?"

"No, but malaria's worse, because if you have yellow fever you either die or get quite well, while if you have malaria you walk about as a living source of infection."

"Can't you get rid of it? Screen the houses?"

"Up forty thousand miles of waterways? Drain the swamps over hundreds of thousands of square miles? Impossible."

"I don't mind having fever," declared Denis. "You know I always get it six or seven times a year, here. I prefer fever to ague or a cold in the nose."

"A matter of taste. But in your cold-in-the-head countries you can still bring up families of healthy children. Many of these riverine regions cannot do that. In Pará and Manáos, yes. As you know, Senhor Antonelli, there are never any mosquitoes on the river of black water, so Manáos is always healthy——"

"That black water makes people bald," announced Denis. "It's *not* nonsense!—I shan't have any hair left in a year or two." Custodio de Freitas went on, without taking any notice:

"There are regions of these upper waterways where there is no native population at all. All the children born there die. The normal state of the people is sickness—the forest fights always against them."

"Your conscience seems to be pricking you, Custodio." Evaristo spoke slowly.

"It is not quite that. As I said at first, I always experience curious sensations whenever I return to the deep interior forests, with our city in the heart of them." He reflected and then went on slowly: "When I see such a number of people crowding up the Amazon as during the last few years, my feelings are stirred. I am proud, I am glad, to see our cities decking themselves out, building beautiful palaces and paving their streets. I feel a personal vanity. But I cannot resist the idea that this is all exotic, that everybody is poised for flight . . . Brazilians as much as anyone else; I do not forget that a few years ago Manáos had only ten thousand people and to-day she has sixty thousand."

"Ah, you see us as vultures! Well, we shall stay while there are any pickings," Denis assured him. "Until something happens to rubber. If a really good synthetic rubber, for instance, were discovered by some meddling chemist . . . or if presently the Eastern plantations get into their stride and flood the market."

Custodio stirred and flushed, showing emotion. "That need not be considered," he said. "How can an artificial industry like that compete with the native home of the *hevea*? We have three hundred million untapped trees. It's impossible." Ware moved away quietly. Custodio went on: "Besides, the plantations are known to be a failure. The trees won't yield latex, and if they do it is of inferior quality . . . and then, planted under artificial conditions, disease is sure to attack the trees. They are rotten with red rust already. And apart from that, the plantations are

in the hurricane belt. The whole thing is abnormal—quite impossible.”

“Isn’t there room for both?” Salvatore suggested.

“The Amazon would be ruined.” Custodio decided. Evaristo shrugged his shoulders, but Denis protested. “But I don’t think so, really. Middlemen like myself would be hit, but we could go away, as you said yourself. As to the laborers, they would turn to any one of a dozen legitimate industries—they could plant foodstuffs, for example. I have often thought that the rubber industry *ought* to suffer a blow, and then the Amazon would have a chance of becoming sane. Was there ever such an economic situation as we have here to-day?” Evaristo turned unmoved eyes upon the Swiss, a little amused. Denis went on emphatically: “Here are rivers full of fish, enough to feed the world, and nobody but a few Indians take the trouble to catch and dry them, hardly sufficient for the local needs. Here’s the richest soil imaginable, and every bean we eat comes in a sack from Portugal. Look at the shelves of the shops! North American flour, French wines, German hardware, Swedish matches, Spanish dried fruit, English cotton cloth. And every one of those things costs ten to twenty times as much as it does in Rio, and fifty times as much as it did at home. Cotton! Think of it! It grows wild all the way from here to Uruguay, and yet on the Amazon we don’t weave one yard of cotton cloth . . . “Ruin the rubber industry—sim, senhores!”

“I wish you would come and make that speech some day before the State Assembly,” said Evaristo gently. “It is highly effective, my friend.”

Next day the sun beat down continuously in a golden torrent of steaming heat. Mile after mile of cacao plantations edged the water, massive little trees with mottled trunks from which the orange and crimson pods were suspended, but these again gave way to the darker and deeper forest. Margarita, following Ware to the rail, asked him: "How long will it take to subdue all this? All this forest?"

He answered very seriously: "About a million years. Or perhaps the forest will win. Who can tell?"

"It looks so calm and still."

"Because we are not fighting it. As far as that goes, none of us are really fighting it. We are sitting precariously on its edges."

"Wasn't it the same with all other great forests?"

"Oh, yes, yes! But this is so much bigger. . . . This is sure to be the very last to go of all the great woodlands of the world . . . the jungles of India and Africa are so much smaller; drier, more tamed. They permit so much more life in their fastnesses. But this Amazonian forest is the strongest, rankest, most overwhelming wild thing left on earth. Look at it!" He threw his hand in a quick gesture towards one bank and the other.

Washed bright and clear by the rains of the previous day, the sky was of a brilliant burning blue that formed a visible rounded bowl, unbroken by the lightest cloud. Under it lay line after line of the forest walls.

Closing down from the implacable sky to the edge of the yellow flood of the river, and only relieved in line and color by the palms and liliaceous plants of the margin, the massed trees stood

thick, upright, of a uniform dark green, the level tops spread in a high meadow of dense verdure. Into the distance the lines of forest traveled serenely, endlessly, taking on shades of pure violet as they retreated and ultimately disappearing in blue, merging with the sky's blue. It did not appear to hide the active world so much as to compose the world, relentlessly, eternally. The sight of it filled the mind with a sense of impotence, completed by the presence of its river ally, the wide waste of tawny water that seemed to be not a river but a sea, bearing upon its long and heavy waves the signs of its irresistible power.

Tree trunks uprooted and borne down like twigs, islands of floating grass and weeds, rushed down the turmoil of the middle, where the swollen current ran strong, with ripples and foam-crested waves breaking its surface. Upon the torn spoils of the forest rode a host of birds. At the sides the current was more gentle, moving along in an enormous mass without effort or interruption.

Not a sound came from the forest: no cry, no song. Not a leaf of its endless succession of marshalled trees appeared to move. It showed no sign of harboring any living creature. The only live things to be seen in all that broad water desert were the birds that sat, silent and motionless, upon the tangled masses of weeds floating down the river.

On the fourth morning after leaving Pará the steamer passed the miniature red bluffs that show the way to Manáos, and crossed the line of the black water.

Now, with the Amazon left behind, to follow its course due westwards, the northwesterly

sweep of the dark Negro began to reveal a series of scenes that were as those of a different world. The tempestuous, familiar rush of the Amazon, noisy and sociable, was exchanged for the silent, almost motionless pressure of the inky flood from the deep eternal forests of the Guianas, stained with long sojourn in those shrouded haunts.

No more did the little gay bushes and palms of the main river bedeck the banks. Instead, great masses of close-leaved, close-ranked trees stood down to the water's edge, with no break at all but in the sudden open spaces where they retreated in a body and left green grassy knolls at the margin.

"At the next turn you will see Manáos," Affonso said as he came to the side of Margarita. She, turning to glance at the deck, saw that her friend Custodio stood silent, his small wrinkled face appearing yellow and more shrunk. Evaristo da Cunha, too, had momentarily lost his smile. He walked the boards apart, his eyes abstracted.

"Ah, now you can see the city . . ."

The steamer rounded a little green hill and introduced a new scene. Upon a slope that dipped again to the hazy blue-green forest that backed and surrounded it, stood a fantastic medley of brightly colored buildings, intersected by long straight streets crossing at right angles. Patches of light green marked the new city gardens; a brilliant shining dome, yellow and blue and green, caught the eye, and between the pink and white walls of completed houses rose the windowless frames of huge new constructions. In the dazzling light, with a blazing sun high above, a shimmer of the air like an opalescent waving veil gave to the town an added unreality. It appeared as a

mirage of the river. Nor did the shrieking of the electric cars as they descended the hill, or the businesslike sounds from the docks dispel this impression of fantasy, to the mind of Margarita. She saw the little fishing village of fifty years before, dreaming in the forest, only waking for a moment when some wanderer from the outer world came that way; she saw the rise and the new appareling of the oasis in the immense green desert; she saw the stream of gold-lusting men, and the struggle that the ancient gods made to repel them—the cruel torturing fevers, the madness that came upon those adventurers. On the upper slant of the hill she could see the white-dotted patch marking the cemetery of which so many tales were told, filled with the bones of those who gambled with the forest and lost. She had a queer feeling that if she shut her eyes tightly for a whole minute and then looked again, the city would have melted away, swallowed by the encroaching trees, and that she would see only the thatched huts of Indians on the edge of the black water.

But, trying this childishly, she raised her lashes to encounter the clear look of Ware, his white-clad figure blotting out Manáos. Yes, she was well, she replied to anxious demands; she had just shut her eyes to see—something—better. As she spoke she moved to look over his shoulder. It was still there, that cobweb town, then! She experienced a sudden revulsion of emotion, feeling her youth rise like a tangible thing, responding to the call of adventure. Who could tell what lay here for them all, this boatload of people with their fortunes in their hands? She was ready. The city was a promise and a challenge.

Loud orchestral strains suddenly rose from below. The vessel had edged her way to the side of the wharf, and a little crowd of forty or fifty people stood staring at the upper deck. All were dressed in white and carried umbrellas like leaf-cutting ants. A cheer went up as somebody caught sight of Evaristo, and the city band broke into violent spasms of sound. Evaristo, stepping to the rail, had recovered his perpetual smile and complacency. He took the tribute of the perspiring musicians with the serenity of an Oriental potentate. A few minutes later he exchanged a few quick words with Francina, descended the gangway with Madame de Freitas upon his arm, and was carried away in a huge motor car to the plaudits of the little crowd. Custodio, a sardonic smile on his lips, murmured to Ware:

“I wonder how many of them would like to stick a knife in his back?”

X

SALVATORE quartered his company in a sunny square a short distance north of the harbor, the hotel occupying one corner and the governor's long, low palacio gracing another. The rooms of Margarita and her sister looked out through practicable balconies into this square, gay with red and yellow crotons, big rosy lilies and scarlet hibiscus, and plumed with little palms like green feather dusters.

They decided that they liked these bare rooms, with no carpets, nothing on the whitewashed walls, and no furniture but the scanty bed, draped with mosquito netting, a tiny wooden table, a chair, and an embryo washstand. It wasn't so frightfully hot, either, with the long windows all wide open, and the cool white walls crossed with blue shadows.

Downstairs at almoco, the dining room's other guests eyed the newly arrived party with acute but suppressed curiosity. There were no other women present, and the men, all dressed in white linen, laughed and talked a good deal during the long meal. The Italian manager, very suave and alert, hovered about the opera company, served the ladies himself with the long succession of elaborate, highly seasoned dishes, and called their attention with civic pride to the breeze that came in through the open shutters.

Salvatore, leaving the girls to unpack, had gone up to the theatre at once with Laroche, and, coming back covered in perspiration but full of

enthusiasm, talked all the time during lunch. The theatre was the most wonderful sight he had ever seen! The most amazing pale-green marble pillars! And the De Angelis paintings! He was sure the railings of the staircase were made of solid gold. Cost five hundred thousand pounds!

"They simply don't care about the price of things," he said joyfully; "did you notice the harbor? Marvelous! And the houses! I saw one to-day that cost four hundred contos; four hundred contos of reis! Just think of that!"

"It sounds opulent, darling, like a lakh of rupees, but doesn't convey much," his wife assured him. "But don't get too vulgar, talking about money all the time. . . . Get it, by all means, but don't offend our womanly dignity by reminding us." He reproached her: "My dear, this is a parvenu city, and what else do you expect a parvenu to discuss but money?" He subsided into rather troubled reflections across the table to Larocche—he was afraid the orchestra was going to be weak in the wood wind. What could they do?

In spite of the beating heat, he took the company up to the theatre after lunch; two or three of the Manáos theatre committee put cars at their disposition, and the girls were all eager. They ran about the theatre with little shrieks of joy, and went through a hasty rehearsal of "*Bohème*" light-heartedly. Several important citizens came in during the afternoon, and Salvatore rather grudgingly presented them to his womenfolk. He looked with gloomy suspicion upon the courtesies of two stout and opulent merchants to the pretty chorus, and yielded without grace to requests that they should all be taken while there was still light to see the city and its environs.

Packed into four big automobiles, they followed the line of a tramway—the Flores *bond*—passing along cool, tree-shaded streets lined with houses built in the Portuguese style, with no concessions to the tropics, but very large and expensive. Most of the smaller ones also were faithful to the Portuguese box-like building idea, many having tiny narrow fronts but extending a long way back. “Like the shotgun houses of New Orleans,” Salvatore explained.

“You pay city taxes on the frontage, perhaps?” His Manáos host assented, adding: “You know these houses are called *puchada*, because they are pushed back.” Salvatore thought that this sounded very simple.

Running farther out, they found themselves on a stretch of high, sandy ground where coarse grass grew under the open sky. It was not unlike Surrey, Margarita said, if you didn’t see the little squat palmettos, and if you half shut your eyes and said that those low bushes were blackberries.

Presently, making other turns, the car passed through a heavily hedged lane with cottages where children and chickens ran about flowery gardens, a lane that had a familiar air, except that in the green meadows at the side there grew big, thorny palms with stiff fan leaves, instead of oaks.

At the end of the car line stood a low, pink-washed, rakish-looking building that declared itself a restaurant. Their hosts insisted on the party getting out and having a cool drink. Salvatore said a few words aside to the Manáos men, and the look of apprehension on his face was only lifted when the ferociously pink liquid presently served turned out to be harmless; luckily for his

peace of mind, he was quite oblivious to the subsequent maneuvers by which Beatriz Sforzi and two of the little Italians were, assiduously plied with champagne.

The bare, cool room was hung with colored paper streamers and strings of orange-colored grenadillas; the only wall ornaments, a few drink advertisements, depicted ladies of remarkable contours. There were some specially efficacious baths, it appeared, near at hand, to add to the restaurant's attractions. From the end of the car line a bend in the lane ran up hill, red and sandy; they decided that there was nothing tropical about it, save the palms and the umbrella ants.

They went back just as night fell with an immediate blotting out of the landscape, scarcely permitting the sight of the steel bridges over the water inlets to which their hosts pointed with innocent pride. How far Manáos had fetched those bits of steel, and how much they had cost! Fireflies flickered in every scrap of garden, above every hedge. It became dark with a kind of velvet, pressing darkness that hemmed in, imposed itself, a tangible thing. Salvatore remarked on it under his breath: "I never felt anything just like this! It's the forest; it oppresses you! I really believe all this nature conspires to make people nervous and excited. They live in a state of exaltation, because their feelings are all thrown back on themselves. I'd hate to stay here. All we want is our money, isn't it, girls?"

He refused to let his company accept invitations to dinner or to spend the evening at a club, marshalling them back to the hotel like a hen with a new brood of chickens. He was furious when Beatriz Sforzi pleaded a headache, stayed upstairs,

and then disappeared from her room, and was not appeased by Francina's laughter. "My good dragon, I think you are making a mistake. The Sforzi is a cat, of course, but she is also a grown-up woman, and there is really no reason why she shouldn't amuse herself. It's no concern of yours so long as she sings when you want her to."

"That's just the trouble. She's going to have her empty head turned, and if I don't keep her locked up she'll be breaking her contract. . . . Make her pay! Good God, suppose she does? What's a few thousand pounds to me when what I want is live women to walk upon that stage and open their mouths? This trip is going to kill me with anxiety and worry. The only girls out of the whole bunch I'm sure of are you two and Bianca—Bianca's too darned ugly off the stage, and too lazy anyhow, to give me any trouble, and Margarita's a baby. It's lucky you're married to me."

"Lucky?" Francina's brows were raised.

"Yes, precious girl, so I've got you safe. Pegged down, darling."

"Safe. Pegged down." She repeated his words listlessly as she sat on the dusky veranda, a cigarette between her fingers. She blew smoke into the night and murmured again: "Pegged . . ." Her husband, immersed in his problems, went on, grumbling half to himself:

"The sooner we get to work the better. They all need something to think about before they lose their heads." Laroche joined them, and the two men sat together with pencils and pads, making notes of the company's needs, appealing to the women now and again. Laroche had spent most of the day in hunting for local musicians. The

town band, it appeared, could be relied upon for the drums, a couple of horns, and a trombone; cornets would do very well in place of trumpets. Altogether, they had not been mistaken in trusting to Manãos for their brass, and there were quite a number of decent violins available. The wood wind was a little more dubious.

"I told you we should be weak," Salvatore lamented, "if we didn't bring flutes and oboes. Are you *sure* that Spaniard is all right with his clarionet? Bah, I don't care a straw for him being a genius. I don't want geniuses. I want a man who can follow the score."

Laroche had unearthed an excellent 'cellist to supplement the expert brought from Lisbon, and was disposed to a roseate view of things. They decided to follow their original plan and to give "Carmen," the classic and inevitable, first, on the following Monday, and to succeed it two nights later with "Bohème." Next, "Pagliacci" and the "Cavalleria"; then "Rigoletto." "Tosco" to follow; "if we can rig up the battlements in the last act." Perhaps they would present "Trovatore" in its place.

The next series could take care of itself. Perhaps by that time the rest of the chorus would be heard of, and they might dare to give the company a few days' rest while Salvatore or Laroche went to Pará to meet them.

Francina, standing up and yawning openly, looked upon the two men, their faces illumined in the hot darkness only by the uncertain glow of their cigars. "Margarita, go to bed," she commanded. "Take care of your good looks, so that our lawful owner can make a lot of money out of us."

Her husband paid no attention to this feminine thrust, smilingly dealt, and she departed, taking her sister by the hand, after a long look into the velvet blackness of the night. The river was a faint glimmering band in the distance; the shrilling of cicadas came from the palms below in the gardens of the wide square. A perfume of tropic flowers rose into the heavy air. Here and there could be seen a burst of light, where a night club stood with open doors, and the crash of a piano and a loud song now and again broke the stillness.

Manáos was and is the only place for spending large quantities of money in all the vast territory of Amazonas, bigger than many a kingdom. To that center came all the rubber gatherers when, at the end of the season's toil, they found money in their pockets, to be spent in a week of rioting. Here were grouped all the merchants who trafficked in that *ouro preto* drawn by river paths from areas thousands of miles away, as far as the Peruvian and Bolivian boundaries. Here were the bankers, the owners of stores who found themselves able to sell anything from a box of matches to a diamond crown when the boom came, the foreign companies who built tramways and docks and breweries and electric light and water plants and marble palaces, and the adventurers to whom the word went out over the world that El Dorado awaited them in the forest.

Rubber went down the huge river in an endless chain of cargoes, and back came in return more money than Manáos could spend. The little town, seeing herself with millions of revenue where she once had thousands, rose and arrayed herself in finery. Up the yellow Amazon came a stream of gay extravagances, the most silken, the most

sparkling, that money could buy. Drawn from across wide seas, this tide of luxury entered the great valley, passed through a thousand miles of the dark and silent walls of the forest, to cast itself upon the little clearing of Manáos. Accompanying it came women, from the north, from the south, from Europe and Africa; even smooth-faced, slant-eyed girls from the Orient, made brave by the wide-cast tales of the spendthrift city, but with deadly fear in their hearts of the fever that so often took its revenge upon them. For those who escaped, with their hands full of money, the name of Amazonas must have been a thing to lurk in nightmares, panic fear masked with gold.

With wealth, the Amazon acquired politics. Or rather, politicians. Now that there was something to govern, Amazonas was compelled to have a government. The system that supervened in the course of a few years was basically simple. All administrative offices, whether of the State of Amazonas or the municipality of Manáos, were in the hands of a limited group of families, arbitrarily divided into two opposing sections. When one section had had its turn of public office courtesy as well as expediency demanded a change, and the second series of families went into office, ringing the changes upon different personalities for the sake of a more decorative effect.

Towards the end of each term of office there rose, as in every region ruled over by the elected, a constantly increasing volume of grumbling. The native-born vote holders, with the foreign exporting merchants egging them on when the imposts upon rubber and taxes upon business began to rise to unimagined heights, made outcries against the

insouciant extravagance, the open graft and intrigue. Their complaints were temporarily allayed by the flashing of new political names before their eyes; at heart, many of the grumblers were more than a little proud of the city's multifaceted glories, believing with facility in the eternal luck of the Amazon.

It was true that there had been recessions of the tide of big rubber prices. Lean years had more than once supervened since the far-away world began to send its ships for the precious gum. But the Amazonenses preferred to consider these as nothing but periods of pause in which the wave gathered strength—and weren't they justified now, when a pound of "Fine Hard" brought twelve solid shillings, mounting from a modest two? And then, even in the slump years, there had always been something that helped them out; as, for example, the time when exchange went against Brazil, and the resident merchant, selling rubber and nuts and cocoa abroad for gold, paid the native producer in depreciated paper, and so once more saved his own cherished skin. With kind heaven smiling upon the Amazon, who cared for a little official stealing?

There was no difference in the platforms of the two political groups. The only burning question was that of just how much added tax the exported rubber would endure: the only problem, that of dividing the proceeds.

Of late, with over a million pounds of public revenues to spend in a town of thirty or forty thousand people, new uses for public money had to be devised. It is a credit to the imagination of the inhabitants that not only was there a constant flow of ideas, but that *Manáos* also was

struck with the brilliant and quite successful notion of going out into the money markets of sympathetic France and England, and getting a few more sacksful of gold as loans. The more income you have, the more you want to spend, of course, and the more you spend, the more your friends will lend to you; it was as simple as it was pleasant. As to the day of reckoning! If any of the temporary politicians thought of it, he also mentally decided that on that day he would no longer exist in the public eye as an office holder, so why worry? He turned his skill to new channels for cash flowings instead.

If, now and again, his methods were a little lacking in artistry, who can blame the forest-bred politician? There was the incident of the new palace of the governor, that beautiful and expensive building, all stone and marble and colored tiles, that took three years to raise—and nearly six months of violent blasting and shoveling to pull down. The new governor, going into office and finding an erection under way that was not altogether to his taste, was supported by quite a number of sympathizers when he decided to have a new one built to his own plans by his own friends; but the opinion of the foreigners was that the thing was rather clumsy. A bank manager was reported to have gone so far as to say: "Some time or other I shouldn't wonder if the Manáos people got a bit vexed, you know."

But while the rafts crept out of the dark forest-hung waterways of the deep inner country laden with their odorous big black balls of rubber, by the hundred, like industrious water beetles; while snorting foreign steamers churned up the great river to take away the ceaseless cargoes, empty-

ing their holds of the silks and pearls and champagne of the east, what was a blown-up palacio more or less?

At the time when Salvatore's opera company arrived in the city an unusual flutter was proceeding in the political dovecotes. Evaristo, to the scandal of Manáos, was hardily departing from the rules of the game.

He was actually trying to keep his party in power for a second term, or rather to prolong the first unduly by a maneuver which was denounced by the hungry opposite party as indecent. The late governor, nominal head of the Freitas-Cunha-Guimaraes group, had gone into office when the most wonderful period of the rubber boom was dawning. Money came in floods: it wasn't possible to spend it all in Manáos. It burned the governor's pockets. His eyes turned Paris-wards. Ah, that was the place for a man with a pocket full of money! You could get something for it there! He went, but in the hurry of departure made one serious mistake.

That unlucky error was the signing of his name to a sheet of blank paper breathlessly presented to him by a perspiring secretary, boarding the steamer just as the gangplank threatened to disconnect.

"Your excellency forgot to authorize the appointment of your cousin's wife's brother-in-law to the postmastership of the sandbank above the third cataract! Sign here, and we will fill in the decree above it afterwards." The rash man signed, his eye upon the gangplank, his last smile for his able deputy, Evaristo.

Some twelve months later, with nearly every franc of his savings spent, preparing sadly to

pack for home, the governor receives a cable from Manáos telling him that he has resigned. And, rushing back to look into this matter, is met at Pará with such efficient-looking gunboats that he immediately decides to abandon politics as an active career; decides, in fact, that the climate of Rio must be healthier for unresigned governors than that of the Amazon, and so goes sailing southwards.

There was still almost a year of the term of office to run. Nobody had the least objection to Evaristo's retention of his deputyship for that unexpired period: that was according to the rules. It belonged to his gang. But that politician, with an auriferous year behind him, did not seem to be satisfied with the vision of his presently approaching retirement. He made a bold move. Remaining always a little in the background, never trying to obtain the sceptre definitely and openly for himself, he induced his party to announce new elections upon the occasion of the governor's resignation, put forward another figurehead of the clique as a candidate, and practically challenged the second series of families to a genuine fight.

The good feeling of Manáos was outraged. This was shameless! Had they not played the game? Had they said anything, anything much, about the late governor's trip to Paris? Had they said anything, anything unreasonable, about Evaristo's conduct of the deputyship? They had not, except so far as it was necessary to prove their own high-mindedness to the public, a little theatre play that every intelligent person understood. They had played the game, and it was a serious grief to them to discover that Evaristo da Cunha

was issuing a genuine challenge to them. They prepared to resist: marshalled their forces. If the Freitas-Guimaraes-Cunha family thought that they owned Manáos, they had yet to learn that the Souza-Queiroz cousins had something to say.

The three chief local clubs buzzed with gossip. Nor were foreigners without interest in the situation, for the peace and the external and internal credit of the State affected the merchants and bankers. Many eyebrows frowned and many anxious fingers wagged above coffee cups and tall glasses at tables set in the three famous cafés or on the shady side of the pavements. The name of Evaristo ran from mouth to mouth. He, cool, sardonic, taking his own way quietly, was perhaps the least perturbed man in the city.

Quite probably, the fact that the date of the opera company's arrival coincided with the preparations for his political *coup* was not accidental. Evaristo knew his city. Vain and pleasure-loving, it might be at least a little distracted from such dull matters as the choosing of public officials by a few weeks of concentrated entertainment. He may have reckoned on this as one of the weapons in his complicated armory.

But, if this agreeable influence of the theatre entered into Evaristo's calculations, there was one item of which he had not been aware, upon whose potency he had not reckoned. He had not foreseen Francina.

XI

ON a clear morning just before six o'clock, with the air so transparent that the gaily colored houses, the bright flowers and shining leaves of the gardens looked as if they were just new, Margarita and Francina, escorted by John Ware and Evaristo da Cunha, trotted their rather scraggy horses along the stone pavements of Manáos. From the hotel door they went for a brief turn about the town, passing houses that had already begun to stir and to open their wooden shutters; cafés and bars and shops crowded with piles of cottons and hammocks; warehouses with wide doors where mounds of black rubber balls waited entry, alertly guarded; the Bolsa Universal, where yawning waiters righted the little tables and set out tiny cups of steaming coffee before their first unshaven patrons, waiting for the *bond* to take them to work. As they turned north to leave the city Evaristo, riding with Francina, pointed out, smiling, the glossy blue and white patterned tiles that faced many of the houses:

“Behold a source of city revenue! In more than one region, senhora! How? Well, imagine that a prefect of æsthetic taste is in power: he orders us all to face our houses with tiles under penalty of a fine—badly needed by the municipality. His successor—myself, for example—has a different idea. He finds tiles insanitary, unsightly, extravagant—who knows? He decrees that all citizens shall strip their houses of these ornaments

under penalty of a much larger fine. Ai, but when one is a prefeito, and for so few of these golden official years, what brains one needs! It is so necessary to set aside a few modest contos for one's family. . ."

They had turned into a broad open street that rose up hill. Ascending it, they saw upon the left hand the railings of a cemetery. It was very thickly inhabited. Rows and rows of dead, some with nothing but mounds over them, crowned by wooden crosses; some with elaborate marble monuments; others surmounted with little upright narrow houses, encasing relics of the dead.

Evaristo checked his horse, and Francina stopped beside him, looking with light curiosity at his unusually serious face. Regarding the graves, he said, as Margarita and John passed and went ahead:

"Here you see part of the toll that the forest has taken. Most of the dead who lie here did not die of the common ailments that attack a number of the weakly in every city and hamlet of the globe. This is a special harvest of the old reaper's, taken greedily; many of them were strong young men who came here after the name of Manáos began to be known in the markets of the world. Almost all who lie here died of yellow fever. Died like that"—he snapped thin fingers. "They fell sick one day and were buried the next. Many of them have I helped to carry up this hill."

He turned in the saddle and looked down. "That was years ago, of course. There is no yellow fever now—no excuse exists for any city to harbor it any more. But fifteen or twenty years ago every man who came here, his veins full of fresh blood, unacclimated, faced the chance of quick death.

They came to conquer the forest and the forest conquered them. I see them coming up that hill in a long procession of youth, a succession of human sacrifices—to what God? The God of Commerce? No. It would be a little theatrical to say that; they came willingly, perhaps spurred by a desire for adventure, as all courageous youth goes afield. There are no crusades, so they come to counting houses.”

They rode on in silence. The cemetery appeared to be at the top of a sandy hill, with the ground falling away on either hand, for now, continuing in the same direction, they soon began to descend. The street-car line beside whose rails they had ridden as far as the graveyard, turned away to the right across the top of the town; houses grew less on the straight road that the riders followed. For a short distance fairly ambitious new erections stood at the road's border on the left hand, but these ended abruptly with a final new building—a considerable structure, a private house with a square tower. He pointed it out, and said with his cool smile:

“That's where I live, where we make all our political plots.”

The road before them was wide and sunny, shaded by four rows of thick trees, most of them handsome Indian laurels with glossy leaves. Down the middle between a closely growing avenue of these trees ran a broad paved path of cement blocks. On either side of this shaded central walk was a sunny road, margined by sparser trees; on the left were open fields; on the right a miniature red clay cliff had been left by the leveling of the highway. On the top of this bank stood a gay little assortment of home-made cottages, built of

almost anything, one supposed, that the owner could find. Some of them were neat, with color-washed walls, and others displayed an ingenious patchwork of stray bits of board, flattened-out oil cans and scraps of sheet iron, the roofs helped out with palm leaves.

These little dwellings on the town's fringe, squatters without rights but with many privileges, grew more rakish and scrappy as the road drew onwards. All were embowered in pink and blue flowering vines, sheltered and backed by bananas, mangoes, hibiscus bushes, oranges—a tangle of growing things. Little steps, cut in the tiny clay cliff, protected by scraps of wood, led to these airy bohemian apartments. Children's voices sounded and small naked brown bodies leaned from among the bushes.

The road ran down in a wide slope and immediately began rising again to a crest against the sky. As the riders walked their horses leisurely down the incline, Evaristo spoke again, recurring to the thought of the cemetery:

"We often buried them in pouring rain. Before the tramway was built, and before we had any carriages or automobiles, we had money, lots of money, especially when the rubber booms came along from time to time. But we had not what you could call the conveniences of life. When one of our friends or employees died we had to find ten men to carry him, and it was considered a point of honor not to hire helpers—even if they could have been readily found. . . . Four men carried the coffin, with another four to take the burden in turn when the hill exhausted the first carriers. Two other men carried chairs. It was customary to make a halt halfway up, rest the coffin

on the two chairs, and drink a bottle of cachaça. When we reached the grave, it was often found not to be long enough, and we had to take a spade and dig in the rain. Sometimes there was no priest . . . we read a few words ourselves."

She looked at him with such wide eyes that he smiled. "Don't think of this time as being all gloomy. When you become familiar with death it is not sad or terrible, and indeed if death were to be dwelt upon under such conditions the survivors would find life insupportable. No. It was taken very lightly. Especially, I think, by the foreigners. They used to say to each other, meeting a man returned from the interior: 'What, are you still alive?' as if it were a great joke. When a man was dying of fever it was thought neighborly of all his friends to go and sit with him; often they could do nothing to help him, but they would stay and while away the time with laughter and card playing until he died. Of what use to do anything else?"

"Women—died too?" she asked him.

"There were none, senhora. Of the strangers, I mean. And of the country, not so very many, either. Except the families who had been long in the region and become immune."

They had reached the crest of the hill. A little water tower stood in a recess in the red bank, level with the last electric-light post; all the cottages had been left behind. Looking forward, to the north, they saw a boundless sea of green. Deep, dark-green tree tops swept away in long waves in front and on either hand, emerald in the nearest flood, tinged with violet as the long lines retreated, and swallowed up at last in a haze of purple-blue that met the paler hue of the sky.

"Now you see a little, a few miles only, a very little indeed, of the forest that encloses us. Look at it—who can resist or counter it?"

They cantered forward, following the two other riders along the sunny red road, past a little path that led down to the creek, the *igarapé*, that lay along the western edge of the city; as they entered the first trees of the bordering forest, the Brazilian looked at Francina's pretty face and changed his tone:

"I have told you too many sad things!"

"I needn't listen if I don't want to! But now tell me something amusing?"

"Something that has nothing to do with griefs? Yes! Women as lovely as you should always smile! I wonder what would make you smile at me?"

"I am laughing at you now," she responded impudently, showing all her little white teeth. He stared at her until she, perfectly enjoying herself, reminded him: "I am waiting for your amusing story, Senhor da Cunha."

He took a dramatic long breath and gave his horse the spur. When he had quieted him again, he said in a low, intentionally agitated voice: "Forgive me. But it is your fault. You are a maddening woman." Francina stooped to adjust her stirrup, to hide a giggle. He began to speak lightly:

"You ought to know the story of our theatre, since you are to sing in it. And then, if this precious erection were nearly to fall upon your adorable head—not quite, because I should fly to your rescue—you could never say that I had not warned you. . . . Let us take this path, there is more shade.

"Once upon a time, as the senhora knows, Manáos was nothing but a little trading point, the remnant of a Portuguese fort, an Indian fishing village, a place where they collected dried fish and sarsaparilla; here it was, a cluster of huts upon a red hill, shut in by the black water and the forest, and naturally there were no amusements. Even after we began to make money when some obliging person over in Europe found out what rubber was, our joys were for a long time only those of children of nature—that is, we only drank and gambled. . . . But when we became convinced that to possess much money was our normal state as the good God intended it, our souls commenced to long for a little more diversion."

She interrupted him: "What's that queer noise?"

"A bird only . . . do I bore you?"

"Indeed, no! I am dying with curiosity! Naturally, your amusements and solaces are of extreme interest . . ." He glanced at her a little suspiciously before he went on:

"I remember very well the first troupe that ever arrived at our water gates. They were Spaniards who had been playing all over South America. There were two men and a woman. One man played the violin and the other did acrobatic and conjuring tricks, and the woman assisted with the guinea pigs and the silk hat and paper flags, and so on. As a culmination of their misdeeds they all sang. . . . It was a very bad performance, and the lady was about forty-seven years old; she had never been a Helen, in her best day. Probably you do not know that 'it is said that those amiable ladies who are so good as to visit these

mundos do Christo of the South American East Coast, to bestow their foreign smiles upon us unworthy ones, always smile first at Buenos Aires. I, as a loyal and proud Brazilian, believe this to be untrue. I am firmly of the opinion that Sao Paulo is the favored spot. Or perhaps Rio . . . the coffee crops, you know." He meditated for a moment.

"However that may be, they say that when the freshness of the smile fades a little with much exercise, Bahia and Pernambuco are the next to bask. And when a certain trace of crows' feet or increasing stoutness is reflected by the too-candid mirror, travel is resumed slowly northward . . . to Pará. And when fickle Pará is no longer grateful, then the journey up the Amazon, where nothing feminine was ever refused an ecstatic welcome."

At her signal they turned the horses and began to retrace their way.

"So it was with the lady juggler. Our theatre at that time was a kind of barn. It had begun life as a warehouse for rubber. There was only one floor, and the élite in the boxes were divided from the rest of the audience by upright pieces of sheet iron. When the people wanted to signify their approval of any act, they kicked the iron. They were a little exuberant. I am sure you understand, senhora. Your audiences will not conduct themselves like that to-day. . . . They threw things, too, money and bonbons and other tokens. They did not mean any harm at all, but a notice had to be put up: 'Please do not throw anything that is likely to injure the performers.' "

"It must have been something like a California mining camp in the gold rush last century?"

"Yes. Perhaps our excitable people were even *more* excitable than the Californians, because there was not, among the foreigners at least, any nucleus of a population that meant to settle down and stay. They were all infected with the idea that they were here just for a moment to make a lot of money, and that they would get it and go—if the yellow fever didn't get them first."

"And the jugglers?"

"Alas! They gave but one performance. For the audience fell in love with the lady, and she smiled agreeably upon them, and presently when some of the men in the boxes made a good deal of noise and started a quarrel with the two Spanish principals, quite a scene was created. It ended by a group of the audience climbing up on to the stage and beating the Spaniards, while the lady was spirited away, to safety, no doubt, by somebody else. Ah, those were enthusiastic days! But please believe me, no Brazilians were concerned in all this—the high spirits of the foreigners, *senhora*."

"Why do you insist upon that?" she asked him blandly. "Are you trying to assure me that my—my chorus—is quite safe?"

He bent fathomless eyes on her. "If I knew what you meant by 'safe' . . ." he murmured. "But as to my jugglers—how strangely fate turns the tables! For can you believe that presently many charming ladies deigned to ascend the river, and actually contended for *our* society. What bliss! I remember a case when a delicious little dancer looked from the stage too sweetly at one of our wealthy merchants for the content of the lady by his side, and she, rising in her injured dignity, marched on to the stage and slapped the

dancer's face. . . . Ebullitions of youth! These things do not happen now!

"I think that we attained to more dignity when our theatre was built. We put on more reserved manners, to suit the splendor. When it was opened and the order went forth that everyone was to wear evening dress there really was a wild hunt all over the town for fragments of those garments. I know of three friends who shared such a suit, and got into the performance over the protests of the doorkeeper. But it's a long time ago since every citizen who wears a coat at all became the possessor of an imported suit of correct evening clothes. We may live next door to the forest, but there is nothing that a ship can carry that we are not prepared to pay for, and we want everyone to know it."

They walked their horses under dark-green arches, through which the light came in bright patches; there was no sound at all in the forest but the faint humming of insects.

"Tell me about the theatre!"

"Indeed, I must tell you! It is unmatched! It is delicious! I know that no other theatre in the world has such a story. . . . Determining that we must have a fine theatre to agree with our new wealth, we chose a magnificent plan for it. Our theatres have to serve for receptions and balls, as well as for stage performances, so we agreed with an expensive architect upon a scheme that gave us the sumptuous rooms and galleries that you have seen. And since money was no object, we decided to carry it out with exquisite marbles and metal work, paintings and panels and so on.

"The materials must have come from half the globe. As we were in a hurry to see it go up, it

was thought best to build it of reinforced concrete, and we sent to Belgium for the structural steel. Belgians, as you may know, *senhora*, are the best steel workers in the world. But they have the fault of being careful with all that they do. You cannot hurry them. So it happened presently that here we were in Manáos, staring at barrels of cement, blocks of lovely marble, beautiful pieces of wrought iron and so on; it began to accumulate in piles; the site for the theatre was leveled and prepared, and there we were waiting. And no steel came along to raise all this seductive material to life. We became a little impatient. We regarded those fascinating barrels and crates and packing cases with longing.

"At last one day gangs of workmen were to be seen, busy on the space where the theatre stands to-day. Under the direction of a local contractor, the cement was being mixed and put into moulds. In another day or two the walls were going up. You see, we had the beautiful plans, with all the measurements, and we made up our minds to build the walls, leaving a hollow space between the outer and the inner layers, so that the steel framework could be dropped in when it came at last. Everybody was enchanted! Our theatre rose daily, before our eyes.

"When the walls were more than half their present height, a steamer came up the river with the Belgian engineer and his structural steel on board. . . . What did he say? What did he *say*? Madame, I assure you, I never saw a man with quite so much expression on his face as that engineer when he saw our theatre. I remember that he said 'Mon Dieu!' many times, like a machine gun. He had an assistant with him, and these two

went, without even stopping to eat or drink, or change their clothes, or even to speak civilly to the Manáos reception committee, and took their instruments and measured our handsome walls. He came into my office, perspiring terribly, and said to us: 'You will have to pull it down.'

"We told him at once that we should do no such thing. 'You put your steel framework in the nice little spaces we have left for you,' we said.

" 'That is an excellent idea,' he said. 'But your builder has been somewhat too generous in his ideas. Your theatre is several metres longer and broader than it should be. My steel framework does not fit this erection.'

" 'My dear engineer,' we said, 'that is your business. You *make* it fit. Stretch it or something!'

" 'Impossible,' he said. 'All the angles are wrong. Your theatre must come down.' . . . Do you think we were going to tear down that beautiful building, the pride of Manáos? Never! We told him so. We begged, commanded, implored; we tried to bribe him. No, he wouldn't. At last he began to talk of the damage to his professional reputation. When a man does that, you know he is weakening. We realized that it was only a question of how many contos of reis it would take to repair the damage: and in the end he listened to reason. He opened the angles and patched it up. But I don't think the work was ever quite the same—you will notice a few cracks. . . . And the fact is that two other things happened to weaken those unfortunate walls of ours.

"Did you see the dome? Yes? That was not our dome originally. No. It was ordered from Holland for Sao Paulo. They are really lovely

Dutch tiles. But when Sao Paulo saw it, they didn't like it, and they said they would not have it. They were just about to ship it back to Amsterdam when Manáos happened to hear of it. We sent a cable without losing a minute, telling them not to send it back. We would take that dome. We were, in fact, in the market for almost anything so long as it cost enough."

"It is a wonderful dome," she said. "You can see it for miles."

"Unhappily it is rather heavy, and it may have helped to crack the walls. There is a fine golden statue standing down in the gardens that we meant to put on the top of that theatre too, but that seemed courting trouble, after we saw the cracks. And then there was another thing. We arranged to have a splendid modern scientific fire-extinguishing system, and you can see the lines of pipes and sprays all through the interior; but it isn't in working order, because we don't dare to fill the water tanks on the roof. If we did, it would be the last straw.

"Nobody cared! We had our brand-new theatre, and when it was opened we went in swarms, despite the cracks and the prophecies of the timid who said it would fall on us. And as you see, it still stands, perhaps in not such bad condition, after all. From here you can see it."

They checked their horses upon the ridge of the road that fell away and then rose again to the city; red roofs shone in the sunlight, the brilliant dome heaving from among them with its blue and yellow and green. Margarita and Ware cantered up behind them.

These two had scarcely exchanged a hundred words during the ride. They rode far along the

direct, broader forest path, she enchanted with the sun-flecked tunnel of green, the butterflies and strange plants; he, plainly preoccupied. As they returned he showed her a little track that ran off at right angles to the west; a tall buttressed tree at the corner of it was heavily notched some four feet from the ground.

"Down this path, about half a mile, you reach one of the black creeks that run up through the city," he said. "I keep my own motor boat there—it's not quite such a handy place as a spot lower down would be, but I have my own reasons." She turned her horse's nose to the little trail.

"It looks very mysterious," she informed him. "I am inclined to explore it."

"Well, it's very narrow, covered with grass and weeds; hardly a path at all. But you'd find Vicente and the Bôto at the end. He's getting her into shape for a trip to the plantation up the Negro, you know, that I'm interested in . . . Bôto? It means a sort of bewitched creature that lives in the water . . . the Indians have quite a few tales."

"You're not going to stay in Manáos for our first performance?" she cried, reproachful, and he answered her soberly: "Miss Channing, I had better get away. I am very busy. And you—you have your friends." He looked at her with close-lipped and desperate tenderness and, moving his horse on, added quickly, "Exploring down my paths is rather dark and thorny work—I won't encourage you. You might be sorry. You belong in the sunshine."

When they rejoined the others and presently came again upon the head of the broad road that led into the heart of the city, the cemetery within

its railings at their right hand, Ware made his farewells to Francina and her sister.

"If you will excuse me—I have to make a call before breakfast."

Francina, frankly inquisitive, demanded: "Upon whom, at this hour? Why, it isn't nine o'clock."

"Luisinha and the babies. I needn't stand upon ceremony with them, and I have some little parcels here to give them. I haven't much time—I am leaving to-night for the seringal up river."

"I think you have a soft spot in your hard English heart for that little fair girl," declared Francina idly, and he answered at once, "Indeed I have; there's a special reason for it." She eyed him rather oddly, remaining a trifle thoughtful as the three trotted back to the hotel.

Riotous sounds greeted them as they dismounted. Salvatore, thumping a piano of ancient if dishonorable lineage, was dragging the scanty chorus through the gypsy song from "Carmen." Francina was taken with a sudden spasm of laughter, and said lightly to Evaristo as he bowed his adieu: "What do you think of my energetic husband?" To which he replied under his breath: "I do not think about your husband."

They went in to a wild accompaniment.

XII

IN the stifling heat of high noon, Margarita sat and wrote steadily. She had pushed the one little crazy table in her bedroom close to the open shutters giving upon the balcony, and looked through the railings whenever she raised her head to the motionless palms and scarlet flowers in the garden of the square below.

Francina, listless with the heat, could be depended upon to neglect every mail. Salvatore, with a rising temperature and consequent moodiness, was trying to sleep off a big dose of quinine. So Margarita, thinking of the Sansoe postman waited for along a moorland path, dipped a rusty pen in watery ink and turned her page.

"We are apparently going to have a *succès fou*, and you will never again tear us from the stage. We gave our first performance last night. I didn't sing, but occupied a box, wearing my silvery dress and trying to look like a distinguished part of the audience. But I had to keep jumping up and running to the dressing rooms to peep at Bianca and Beatriz and Francina, and to the flies to stare at the stage, listening to bits that I could really have heard much better from the box. It was lovely! We gave "Carmen," and Beatriz looked beautiful, but it was Francina who got the most applause because she sang deliciously and was as fair as an angel among so many brunette complexions. The men were all very good, but nobody took the least notice of them. The audience was nearly all

Manáos' merchants and politicians, with so few wives that you could count them on your hands. We had to rake the city for a decent band of gypsies, and some of them got stage struck and were left in front of the curtain—the audience applauded rapturously.

“Everybody is tremendously kind to our company's shortcomings. Nobody smiled when Beatriz cracked on her top notes—you know she always does when she's excited. The whole city seem to take a paternal interest in us and wants to invite us out. When we were patching up the scenery for days after we arrived, half Manáos came to help us. Salvie locks the doors during rehearsals now, only he daren't shut out the millionaires. The theatre is lovely when it is lighted up, but Francie says she has to keep her eyes away from the startling row of celebrities' portraits hung in mid-air below the balcony. Heaps and heaps of flowers were sent to us, but, alas! they are nothing but shrivelled brown rags in an hour or two. These tropical flowers don't last like our sturdy roses at Sansoe.

“We are to give ‘Bohème’ next, and I am to make my début. Of course I pretend to be nervous, just so as to make as much sensation as Beatriz, who always faints and has hysterics before she goes into action. But I am not a bit nervous really. I can't get it out of my head that everyone is friendly, that they are going to treat me with indulgence, and that it is all a big joke. I think the atmosphere of the place has something to do with this feeling; it is exciting, and you're always on tiptoe for strange experiences. I feel rather blank when things turn out to be quite commonplace. The stage seems to be set all the

time for something breathless, and it is no more exciting to walk upon the theatre's board than to step out on this balcony in front of my little table, to see a load of big black balls of rubber passing, and a little way behind them a gaunt, ragged, drooping family from the drought country."

Reading over this last paragraph, Margarita tore up the page. No, that was not the sort of thing to write to Sansoe. She re-took her tale upon a different theme.

"We are having a delightful time, as far as Salvatore will let us, but he is very tyrannical! The seductions of the most courtly men are frowned upon, much to our grief; and the only invitations we are permitted by our ogre to accept are family parties and morning rides. Meanwhile we are all quite well and the weather isn't nearly so hot as you'd think. I assure you that the Amazon is maligned. There aren't any mosquitoes. I ride every morning with some of our friends, often on open sandy country that might be Surrey—actually, I have seen sheep! Rather disappointingly tame animals, when you are hoping for boa-constrictors and tigers.

"Yesterday our good Madame de Freitas invited us to a family gathering. We went in great state, our magnificent motor car taking us first for a drive through streets full of thick shade trees, very sunny and with awfully blue shadows. All the houses are washed with pale colors so that everything has a bright pearly look. We came at last to the outskirts of the town and stopped before a high white wall with showers of bright purple bougainvillea falling over it. A huge green door, solid enough to keep out a besieging force, flew open, and bowing wonderfully stood our

friend Custodio. We went indoors and here was a tremendous array of people, crowds of people, babies, small mites toddling about, little thin girls and thick fat boys, and a hovering flock of slim youths in their teens; and lots of quite beautiful young girls with creamy skins and great dark eyes.

"In chairs all round the room sat serene matrons, every one of them handsome and contented looking and queenly. Several men came in later; you could really divide them into two chief types—big, rather stout full-faced ones, and the thin, small bird-like kind who often have rather large heads, and who always say something interesting when they talk. Our Custodio is one of these. They seem to be very acute, a little pessimistic, and they stand off and regard themselves, their neighbors, the Amazon and Brazil, and all sorts of international affairs ironically. I have never in my life heard people—not even Mrs. Grenville—make such withering—no, blasting—surveys of their own environment. I have a kind of instinct never to agree with them, though.

"We soon found out that all this enormous crowd of people belonged to the house; they were either of the Freitas or Guimaraes or Cunha families. I can't believe that they all lived in that house, because there were certainly between twenty and thirty of them; but if they don't all sleep there, they seem to run in and out of each other's homes all the time. I do not wonder now that the women, the real Portuguese and Brazilian women, don't go out much. If they want diversion and social life all they have to do is to stay at home. There are all kinds of exciting things to see and discuss without ever going outside the garden

walls. Just think, Mesdames de Freitas had eleven children, and all of them are alive but one, who was killed by Indians in the forest of Matto Grosso when he was putting up a telegraph line. Some of them are in Pará and two daughters are in a convent, but quite a lot of them are here, married, with heaps of children of their own, and some of those are married, too. A couple of the babies are madame's great-grandchildren, and she is only sixty, although she might be any age. Her face is all covered with wrinkles, out of which a wonderful smile comes; she has bright big eyes and wavy black hair with only a few gray threads.

"They all seem to like each other very much. One of the daughters-in-law is French, and came straight to the bosom of this family when she married. She said to me that the only thing that bothered her was that none of her sisters-in-law ever had a cross word with each other; it was rather dull for her. The funny thing is that while all the children are adored, they don't seem spoilt, and it is delicious to see them half kneel and kiss the hands of the grown-up people whenever they go in or out. I shall teach Brooke these nice manners when I come home.

"We had an immense quantity of things to eat, served on an enormously long table that nearly filled the big airy room, with windows opening on to a garden full of palms and tuberose and flowering creepers. We had soup made with black beans, a fish cooked whole (a tremendous creature), and served with red pepper sauce and herbs that tasted very good, chicken done with yellow rice, and then a feijoada—this was the *pièce de résistance*! It was stupendous! At that stage I couldn't eat very much unfortunately, but I was

able to understand its possibilities. Everyone seemed pleased to tell us how everything was cooked—it isn't bad manners to comment on the food, or at least, they said it wasn't when we asked them. But perhaps that was just their good manners again! You put *carne secca*, tongue, ham, chicken into a thick stew of black beans; you serve it with a heap of *farinha de mandioca*, very much like sawdust to look at, and somebody peels an orange for you and you stir it all up and eat steadily for about a week, with some green stuff called *cova*.

"Next, sweets—*doces*, made with fresh Brazilian nuts, pounded up with sugar, ever so good. We drank (very little drops, with Salvie glaring at us and thinking out loud about our precious throats) Portuguese wines and then, at the end, little cups of strong black coffee. Imagine all that food at midday in a boiling hot climate, and yet people seem to thrive on it. It makes you wonder if there isn't a terrible lot of nonsense talked about the sort of food you ought to eat. Here half the population eats what should be heaps too much meat, and the other half lives entirely upon *mandioca*, and yet here they are quite alive and pretty strong, I suppose."

Looking up from her letter, the eyes of the girl were caught by the rapidly moving figure of a man who crossed the pavement on the opposite side of the road beneath her window, in a blaze of sun. John Ware! Disappearing in the distance without calling upon her, without caring if she was alive or dead, indifferent! Detestable person, she cried to his retreating back. Taking up her pen, she wrote hurriedly:

"Our friend Mr. Ware neglects us abominably.

He sent a note to say he was leaving the city a few days after we got here, and all I have seen of him since he returned is the back of his head——”

At that moment something light caught her eyes again; the white-clad figure of a man who once more passed along the pavement below. John Ware returning, but still hurried, still oblivious. Resentment surged in her heart, and she did not know why she rose and, standing in the shadow of the shutter, watched him approach the corner. He reached it, and there hesitated, half turned, looked up at the hotel; stood with his eyes for four long seconds fixed upon the balcony of Margarita's room, and then, with a curious quick gesture, a hasty clenching and flinging of his hand, turned the corner and was out of sight.

Again Margarita tore up part of her letter. As she took up her pen once more and went on writing, her lips parted in smiles.

“From my balcony,” she went on, “I can see directly into the square, full of mango trees and palms like feather dusters. Down on one side is the governor's palace, a long low house; some day they will have a grand new one, at the top of the same street where the theatre stands, when they have finished pulling it down and building it up again. On the left I can look across the corner of the square, down and into a garden with a high wall. There are not many plants in the garden because nearly all the space is full of little tables and chairs. When a piano isn't being banged there is a squawking gramophone that shouts songs and dance tunes, and last night the place was crammed with people who kept joining in the songs and getting up and dancing between the tables. They kept this up all night long till

dawn came, and although I slept (you know when I am going to sleep, I *do* sleep) yet in between naps I heard the queerest high-pitched laugh of a woman. Two or three times I got up and went to look into the garden, all hung with little bright lamps, but couldn't make out who laughed in that queer way. It was the most melancholy sound I ever heard, and it has stuck in my head all day long."

She hesitated over this; again tore a page into scraps. No, that did not belong to Sansoe.

"The first morning I got up very early and went for a walk, up a street where long lines of ants bustled along with chips of green on their shoulders, with the manner of people who had the work of the world upon them. I found the cathedral, too. But I was afraid of being lost—alas! I wish I had learnt more Portuguese from dearest Nair, and so came back, to find Salvie standing at the door, almost jumping up and down with rage. How could I worry him so! And what right had I to show myself! Please stay indoors, he begged, he entreated, demanded, with tears! At least until he got us staged. You would think we were Circassian beauties to be kept veiled. It was with difficulty that Francie and I and Bianca got permission from our tyrant to go to hear mass; he won't let any of the chorus out of their rooms. He and Mr. Laroche spend half their time sending back presents from kind persons before the girls see them.

"I wonder if there is really an exciting air about this place, or if I imagine it because I have heard it so violently discussed. But it seems as if there was a suspended, breathless atmosphere of waiting for something to happen; as if the whole

place were fictitious and any minute a puff of wind might come and blow Manáos away. You feel as if it can't be true, and you try to look through the dazzle to find out what is real. And the people seem to walk about as if they knew the place was just here for a minute, and that they enjoyed the joke, and that nobody would hold them accountable for what happened.

"Of course this is absurd; there are lots of nice, dear people with real homes here like the Freitas-Guimaraes-Cunha families, who are born and get married and bring up their children in turn like the rest of the world. I suppose the impression comes from the floating mass of foreigners, all of them making frantic amounts of money and getting light-headed. I should be light-headed too if my income suddenly jumped from a few pounds a week to ten thousand—indeed, the possession of the few pounds by themselves has an effect upon me! To-night there is a reception at a wonderful house——"

At that moment the lean camareiro showed a smiling face, crowned with a mop of black curls, at her door: it was time for almoço—would not the senhoras descend? He had already called Madame Antonelli and the other ladies—and here they were. He bowed the girls downstairs with the air of a proud showman.

XIII

AT eleven o'clock that night the sisters stood in a brightly lighted wide room, bedecked with palms and flowers, among a crowd of people. Francina, radiant, laughed and aired her passable French, while irreproachably groomed men bowed over her little hands. Evaristo da Cunha, suave, his eyes softened, stood beside and a little behind her, not moving except to acknowledge with his agreeable smile the homage of the smaller politicians and the careful courtesies of the foreigners. Fair-headed Englishmen from the Harbor company and the banks, Americans from the big rubber company, Germans, French, Portuguese, all came in for at least a few minutes. Whenever small groups gathered in outer rooms and corners, the price of rubber was being discussed.

Margarita, standing by her sister, her eyes dreaming, her face pale, replied a little absently to pleasant greetings and looked from time to time over the courteously bent backs towards the wide entrance. Watching her, you might have decided that some fixed idea possessed her, that she expected someone, and that her smiles and gay retorts were checked in a curious manner whenever the shadow of a newcomer touched the threshold of that bright room. And when her eyes suddenly lighted at the sight of a fair-haired, slender man, who presently came in, talking earnestly to Affonso Guimaraes, and you noticed that she broke

off in the middle of a sentence, forgetting what she was saying and remaining inattentive to her interlocutor, you might have thought her an unmannerly young woman.

When Ware looked across the room, the little hypocrite at once glanced away, bestowed a lovely view of her long eyelashes upon the dark gentleman who stood nearest at her side, and began to talk gaily. And when, after ten minutes or so, he came to her, she greeted him with the same small coquetries that she used upon the group about her.

He surveyed her, an enchanting vision in her transparent rosy frock, with her air of a wood nymph subtly transformed into that of a dancing princess, with a look of regret and almost obvious jealousy. She retained her delicate remoteness and yet there was a real if vague difference; he said to himself that this was inevitable. He had seen more complete changes, and he must be resigned to this. But he felt the rebellious pang of the betrayed. Little comrade of the moors, are you gone? he said to himself, looking into her charming face. His eyes were gray granite, his manner ironical, as he, too, bowed low before her.

It was after some minutes of compliments, of reproaches from Francina for his neglect, countered by his cool: "I beg that you will pardon a slave! You know I am a mere clerk, a subordinate, when I am not a seringueiro," that Margarita said to him suddenly, finding him close at her side:

"Do you know that I have something of yours? —the tie that you lent me when I went riding."

"Yes? It is of no more service to you?"

"I am not so sure of that!" she laughed, her

manner teasing. "I think I will keep it to make magic with, in case I want to call you when you disappear again into your cave in the forest."

He fixed serious eyes upon her that suddenly became blue, and spoke in an intent and lowered voice: "Would you have to make magic to call me?"

She stared at him without a reply. He went on almost under his breath:

"If here, at any time, you want something . . . will you call me?"

Abashed, her gay smiles gone, she waited a second or two and then answered as seriously as he had spoken: "Yes." And then, as Francina turned to them with some laughing comment, Margarita recovered from her momentary surrender to his gravity and asked him: "Why don't you say that you'd fly from the ends of the earth to serve me? That's the correct sort of thing, in Manáos! Englishmen will never have Latin manners, alas!"

He made no reply to this, but said briefly: "I have to return to the seringal in a few hours. Permit me to make my adieux."

She stopped him with a gesture, urged by some imp. "You really *don't* say the right things, or do them, either!" She held out her slim hand, looked consideringly at her fingers, transparent against the light.

"You don't even kiss my hand, as everybody else does."

Receiving no immediate response, the imp sent her farther. "Won't you? Just for the sake of appearances, here? Come, you should at least pretend to be decently civil to me." She offered her hand provocatively.

The young man took this hand, raised it, looked at it with attention, almost as if committing its lines to memory, and then, still holding it, moved a little closer to her and said: "Margarita, I don't kiss your hand, now or here. When I do kiss you—when I do kiss you—I shall not kiss your hands only, and not in sight of a hundred people. Don't—ever—say a thing like that to me again."

He dropped her hand and was gone. With the instinct of a woman, she glanced quickly about to see if anyone had observed this interlude. No, apparently. There was a stir at the door, as some notability came in; all heads were turned in that direction. She had a moment to recover from the feeling that Ware's words roused; she felt her cheeks bloodless, her body trembling. She said to herself that she was angry with him, that he was abominably impertinent, that he would have to ask many times before she forgave him.

But as she began to dance, a moment later, with a mustached gentleman who looked just like the portraits of King Carlos, she heard a little tune that began to sing itself in her heart, a little tune that made her head swim and brought a mist of gold before her eyes, so that the lighted room and faces of people passed like shadows before her. It was when she returned to Francina's side, where this matron sat in a rather secluded alcove with the head of Evaristo very near her own, that she first experienced a feeling of awakening from this dream. Francina, displaying traces of unusual irritation when her sister approached her, let her escort take his leave without more than a word, and then showed a malicious face. Eying her sister, frowning slightly, she said abruptly:

"So your dear friend Mr. Ware has actually

been able to tear himself away from his *enamorada* in the forest for a few hours! You must feel flattered."

Margarita looked at her, quite uncomprehending her sister's intention. Francina, more impatiently, went on: "I think you ought to pay less attention to Mr. Ware. Whenever he is anywhere about, you let him monopolize you in a dreadfully conspicuous manner. It's time you were sensible about things like that. You can run about in England with men, but you can't here——"

"Run about!" murmured Margarita, surprised. She knew Francie's hasty temper, but could not understand this new irritation.

"Well, I am warning you. You had better look for a husband who isn't a planter without one penny to rub against another."

Margarita plucked up a little spirit. "O Francie, don't be vulgar. How could you say such a thing?"

Francina checked herself, closed her lips, seemed to think for a moment, and followed a different lead. "Of course, I was joking . . . but dear child, I feel very responsible for you, and I don't like to see you getting—even a little bit—interested in a man whose conduct—whose ideas of morality—whose——"

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Margarita.

Francina dropped her voice. "Dearest child, don't you know, don't you remember that half-Indian girl with the fair baby on board ship? The girl who Vicente is said to be married to? How obliging of Vicente! Didn't you notice how much John Ware was interested in that girl and that

blonde child—as fair as he is! You didn't think that was Vicente's child, did you?"

Margarita stared at her, her heart ice, leaden. "I don't believe it," she managed to whisper, but even as she made the assertion a panorama of quick memories passed through her mind: Ware on board ship, going down to the lower deck every day to visit Luisinha and the babies, his open fondness for the little fair child, his rather strange withdrawal from her own society since they had reached Brazil. She felt a gust of shame and anger.

A group of people approached the alcove. Evaristo da Cunha, his enigmatical eyes half shut as he looked at Francina, his arm lightly within Affonso's; a tall young man, weedy, with a melancholy face, came with them. Margarita was compelled to bend her stiffened lips into smiles, but as she danced and responded to gallantries the tune no longer sang in her heart; a kind of stubborn argument went on, against her will, instead. Lonely men in the tropics! said one voice; what *didn't* they do! And another declared, obstinately: I don't believe it, while the first again said: Rubbish! Why shouldn't it be true? And in response she only heard: What does it matter? What does it matter to me?

Affonso did not seem to notice her abstraction. She replied to him almost at random, but he had the face of an enraptured young man as he bent over her. Evaristo, who never danced, remained at Francina's side, and she presently said to him coolly: "I am wondering whether it would be judicious to encourage my pretty sister to marry your cousin Affonso."

"Why not?" He bowed with a sweet smile, his

smouldering eyes upon her fair neck, and went on quietly: "There is no religious difficulty, and they are both of good family. If you need a diploma, madame, I will answer for Affonso's character."

"You would like it?"

"Assuredly. Anything that would help to bind you—to us."

"Ah, you are simply being gallant," she said, simply and directly. "Of course, at the same time, I do not know that our own family would consent. But seriously, I wished to know your views about these two."

"Seriously, then, you need have no doubt about our view, or of Affonso's future," he answered her in kind. "But now, tell me! Is it necessary for you, for the women of your family, to have the consent of their parents—when they love? Is it a Cornish custom?"

She regarded him with calm eyes.

"I will tell you what is our custom. To hold our heads very high. As high as your eyes can reach, senhor."

"My eyes can see as far as the topmost heights of love."

"I do not know what love is," said Francina, still without any smile.

"I could teach you."

"I do not know. I am not sure that I wish to know. Do you think that you are not, perhaps, thinking of passion and not love? Ah, remember that I am not a child! I do not fear passion! But love! That is what makes women fools—that is the ruin of millions of us." She continued to look at him steadily.

"It would be worth while living, to have you, a woman like you, foolish about me for an hour,"

said Evaristo in a very low voice, not meeting her eyes. She began to laugh.

"If I am, if I ever am foolish, for an hour, it would only be because I was sure that you were foolish about me for—oh, let's say a year. If I ever committed an indiscretion, it would be only because you risked your life or your career for me. If I ever gave you my little finger, it would be because you gave me——" She hesitated for a few seconds. "Because you gave me your whole body."

This seemed to startle him a little. He spoke slowly when he responded. "Are you offering—terms? And do you think you are making hard terms?"

She laughed again. "Terms! Heaven forbid! But, you know, if they were, you need not take them."

"You would not have told them to me unless you knew that no yoke you could put upon me would be heavy, no terms hard. Or if you did not mean to keep your side of the bargain, and to give me that little finger."

She did not answer, looking upon him with clear eyes.

He rose and stood smiling.

"I have no shame in monopolizing you, madame, but it may make the evening more interesting in your memory if I allow my enemies an opportunity of paying their respects to you."

"Your enemies! You permit them to breathe the same air?"

"For two reasons. In the first place, we meet on neutral ground here: this is a house without politics. In the second place, I find it stimulating to have visual proof of the fact that they are still

alive and active. . . . The world would be so dull if one had only friends."

"Oh, you are quite right, I am sure. Only, as I have never had any friends . . ." Francina murmured.

Across the room a stout, serious-faced man talked with an attentive group, but sent a fugitive glance in the direction of the sisters.

"You know already some of my bitterest opponents," said Evaristo with calm. "That citizen in the distance is Domingos Souza senior. He has a great deal too much money for which he did not work. He does not know why, because he is a rubber dealer, his wife should now pay two hundred pounds each for her dresses instead of making them herself out of muslin. Women take to money like, as you say, ducks to water. . . . But men! What difference does money make to them? They eat red beans and farinha just the same."

"You seem to sympathize with him."

"I like him personally. There are good reasons. The best of them is that he writes exquisite sonnets. Beautiful. Bilac himself has said that they are good. But unfortunately, instead of sticking to verse he wants to be governor."

"Why should he not be governor?"

"Ah, madame, he has not the necessary physique. Too flabby. One has to be made of rubber or of wire springs. It is a wearing life. He is too anxious. He worries himself. For his own sake, I couldn't consent——"

Custodio de Freitas came up to them, Leona upon his arm. She looked like a figurine, was so much smothered in powder that her golden skin could not be seen, and kept her heavy-lidded eyes

almost shut. Custodio, very small and thin and yellow in his evening clothes, saluted the sisters with smiles that livened all his wrinkles.

"Is it an indiscretion to ask madame where her charming husband is?" he murmured to Francina. "There is a little matter of business the committee would like to settle with him, a debt we owe. How happy we are that you came! You have made such a brilliant success, the city is so enchanted, so utterly at your feet——"

Francina tried to appear as if she were covered with blushes. "You are all too kind. We are enjoying every minute of our stay here, all too short. As to my poor husband, he has a touch of fever, and must stay in bed. I ought to be at home, a dutiful wife, putting wet towels on his head."

Custodio was deeply concerned. "But you must permit me to visit the senhor. And my cousin, the best doctor in the state, will see him——"

Evaristo also intervened. "Malaria is not a thing to be neglected. The remedies are simple, but it is imperative that they should be consistently taken."

"Oh, but he isn't really ill," Francina protested. "He's very cross, poor soul, because his voice has failed him. We didn't want him to come to the theatre this morning for rehearsals, and he quarrelled with everybody just because he has a temperature."

"Fever has curious effects——"

"If he is not able to go to the theatre to-morrow, I am afraid that after 'Bohème' and perhaps 'Pagliacci' or 'Rigoletto' we shall have to put off any more performances for a few days," she went on seriously.

"A very good idea, madame, although we may regret the cause. But anything that will prolong your stay here——"

"Someone, you see, has to go down to Pará to meet the Italian boat. She is due next Wednesday. And if Mr. Laroche has to go and Salvatore is ill——"

Custodio and Evaristo united in protests at her distress, as she raised troubled eyes to them. She must not alarm herself, she must not be worried; whatever happened, Manãos would be well satisfied. She had not forgotten that on Sunday a water picnic had been arranged, up the Negro to the islands where orchids grew? Custodio promised himself the pleasure of showing the visitors rubber trees in a real seringal. It would not be necessary to postpone the trip?

"Oh, no! Margarita adores picnics, and even if I could not go this time, Bianca and Beatriz would be delighted." She glanced about the room as she spoke, saw Bianca dancing sedately, and beside a screen caught sight of the marcelled head of the Sforzi, attentively turned towards a short and swarthy man who seemed to be breathing into her neck.

Leona, in spite of her half-shut eyes, noted the look, and began to speak in her languid French. She never spoke Portuguese in public.

"I should warn you of my Uncle Custodio. He will make you walk for miles in a dark and steamy forest. And what is worse, he will tell you all about the industry of rubber."

Everyone laughed, Custodio's eyes disappearing among his wrinkles, and someone reminded Leona that she was to be one of the victims herself. She flickered her eyelashes towards a dark

and slim young man who hovered on the edge of the group, and murmured, "But I shall not listen. I have such a cleverness at not hearing things." She moved a step nearer to Francina and murmured in a lower voice, "I did not, for example, hear just now what is being said to your *prima donna* by that strange individual with all the diamonds on his hands."

Francina glanced quickly towards the flowery screen, and bit an angry lip as she took in the flushed exuberance of the Sforzi's admirer and the giggling delight of the lady. "I could beat her to death joyfully," she said. "She has not moved a step without that kind gentleman at her side for two days."

She reflected, speaking in an undertone. "I am terrified to speak to her, or I would invite her to join us. . . . She was in a frightful fury this morning. She sang abominably and Salvie was cross too and he scolded her. He said she was a quarter tone sharp all through one aria, and Laroche was just remarking that that wasn't possible because she was a half tone flat on all her high notes, and at that moment the orchestra stopped suddenly, and the Sforzi heard him and wouldn't open her mouth again."

As she spoke, Beatriz Sforzi stood up, flitting an enormous fan, and, followed by the dark citizen with the diamonds, went from the room in a cloud of floating chiffon.

She never came back. Next morning a telegram pushed under Salvatore's door announced the first defection from the opera company.

XIV

SALVATORE did not join the water picnic. The touch of fever that had troubled him on the day after the first performance recurred forcibly, and Francina elected to stay with him. "I hate getting up early, and I object to knowing anything more about the rubber industry," she hastened to explain, when Affonso complimented her devotion. From the trip Evaristo also defected at the last moment, and Affonso brought his handsome secretary, Domingos Souza junior, to make the third man. "A charming fellow, quite without intelligence," Affonso said of him airily. "I like to attach him to me because he is of the opposite political camp. It's rather rash of him to trust himself to my hands. It might be rash of me, no doubt, too, but the dear fellow is too beautifully stupid. . . . You will notice he carries a little pocket mirror, like all the young men of our best families. When you see him staring passionately into it sixty times a day, you don't wonder that I trust him with the keys of my desk."

They started in the half light of dawn, Affonso's carriage taking the three girls down to the water landing where the Guimaraes' big motor boat was moored; they were on their way before the mist was off the surface of the water. Running rapidly into the Negro from the igarapé, the boat cut through the almost currentless black water without encountering any noticeable resistance, making for the islands lying some fifty miles above Manáos. They made about fifteen knots, running

beside the left bank, close enough to catch the breath of sweet flowers hanging from the high tree tops, blown in the soft gusts of fresh morning. As the sun rose, immediately turning the chill air to glowing, saturating warmth, birds began to call from the thickets, and couples of scarlet tanagers played in the tangles of creepers. The trupial called again and again, a clear, ringing, intimate call from the close leaves.

The black river narrowed, then widened again, the dense forest marching along its margins, and, in that unusually dry season, showing the great buttressed roots and a strip of soil or sand beneath them. Soon after ten o'clock the motor boat began to pass the wooded sides of green islands that lay in the middle of the river, with white sandy shores shelving to the water. Here the vegetation was more varied, lighter in color than in the dense, close forest with its great trees covered with small dark leaves; here were bushes and assahy palms, more undergrowth and flowers. Scores of pretty parasites perched in every notch of the branches; bunches and clusters of orchids dripped long trails of yellow flame. Little slim-stemmed trees with shivering silver-backed leaves bent over the river.

They stopped for breakfast at a beautiful clean white beach, a first-class place for turtles' eggs, Custodio declared. They lighted a fire quickly, made coffee, and ate an enormous breakfast. All sorts of food came out of the capacious baskets of the Guimaraes. Margarita declared herself still sleepy and was actually rather pale and silent; Bianca, cheerful as ever, drank champagne and flirted with the much-flattered Custodio; Leona Guimaraes, deliciously painted, with

her air of a bisque china doll, did not stir from the imperturbable, dignified calm with which she permitted the open adoration of young Domingos Souza. It was at the end of the meal, when Affonso leaned over Margarita to pour fresh scented black coffee into her cup that he remarked in a low voice but quite casually: "It is in Evaristo's seringal, you remember, that your friend Mr. Ware has a share . . . his section is not far from here. Perhaps we shall see him."

Startled, and becoming paler than before, she said quickly: "Oh, no!" and then as he raised interrogative eyebrows she went on: "I mean, he doesn't expect us. Perhaps he won't be there."

"No, he does not expect us. Not at all. But I daresay he can stand the shock," said Affonso calmly. "The fact is, I have a message for him, and perhaps I may have to ask you to let me leave you for a few minutes while I go to find him." She did not reply, and Affonso added after a pause: "He is really a rubber enthusiast. He spends so much time here now—he must be attracted to this spot. And no doubt he is getting the seringal into excellent order. It was not very good a few years ago—too near the city. Over-tapped."

He helped the girl to her feet, as the boat's engines began to throb.

They left one of the servants behind to wash the dishes and re-pack, and Affonso took the wheel. The sun beat down with immense power, and not even the swift motion of the boat could counteract that pitiless blaze; it was a marked relief when they left the open river and cut between a couple of islands whose overhanging woods threw green shade over the channel.

"The seringal lies on the other side," Affonso explained, and Margarita asked him how he knew the way. There were so many islands and water-paths.

He smiled. "I am not quite so clever as I should like you to think me. Any of these channels will take us to the other side of the river, and when I come out from the islands I look out for a curious clump of trees growing on a rocky spit—here we are. Look north, senhora. Do you see it? No? We must run a little farther up."

When, a few minutes later, she reported sighting the jutting rock with its cluster of straight trees, he was pleased. "What did I tell you? Now, there is a little water path, a tiny igarapé, running into the forest exactly opposite, and we can cross directly to it."

The opening was invisible a few yards away, closely hung with verdure and guarded by enormous buttressed trees; the motor boat crawled in, with only a few inches to spare on either side, and was at once almost in darkness under the matted foliage. When they had run about half a mile along this channel Affonso shut off the engine; where the boat came to a stop there lay on the left a tiny clearing visible through a screen of slender shrubs, a grass-thatched hut standing in the sun at the top of a little path.

"Here we are! Let us make a call upon our friend," Affonso said quietly. "I will go and find out if there is anyone at home." Jumping from the boat, he ran to the hut, pushed open the door, and looked keenly at the few objects it contained—a hammock slung from corner to corner, a chair, a shelf of tins and boxes and a book or two, a bundle suspended from the rafters out of the

way of ants. Margarita, impelled by a curious feeling that led her to interpose, as if she was obliged to take care of the lares and penates of the absent Ware (not that she cared anything about that person!) got up and stepped ashore. Nobody else stirred, although Bianca cried out that this was a most romantic spot—"full of flies and ants and garrapatos," said the placid Leona.

Affonso, shaking his finger in signal that no one was at home, came out, shut the swinging bark door, and then, instead of returning to the boat, began to peer about the edges of the clearing; when he found a trampled trail that led into the forest behind the hut he went a step or two along it, made sure that it continued, and then came back to the motor boat, saying in a decisive voice: "I think that Mr. Ware is probably in the little seringal on this side of the igarapé. Will you kindly wait for me—just a few minutes? I will have a look and return very soon."

He was visibly disconcerted when Margarita, her curious impression crystallizing, came forward declaring: "I shall come with you."

"Oh, no! It's too hot, and there's no path: and nothing to see. The good seringal is on the other side of the creek. We can go there later—you must not become tired with the heat," he protested. Vainly, for she took no notice and followed him along the winding trail that was only to be discovered by watching the bruised verdure underfoot; it was screened with thorny bushes and overhung with long vines that Affonso held back for her passage.

When they had walked for four or five minutes, making their way in silence through the matted bushes, negotiating the boles of great trees whose

roots rose like walls three or four feet high, they parted a curtain of lianes to find themselves on the edge of the second clearing. A long hut, double the size of that on the edge of the igarapé, stood here, and the smoke that poured through the opening showed that it was or had been occupied.

"Perhaps he is there," murmured Affonso, and his watchful manner again struck Margarita as strange. She walked forward and spoke out loud: "Why should he be here? Surely he hasn't got two huts to live in?"

As she spoke the half-open door moved quickly, and Ware, probably hearing her voice, appeared. With a smothered exclamation he came out and deftly fastened the door behind him. His manner was composed as always, but his pale face was covered with perspiration; his cotton shirt was open at the neck, his sleeves rolled up. He mopped his forehead with a handkerchief as he came towards his visitors, looking at them without a smile. The thought occurred to Margarita that the eyes she had imagined to be blue were really as light and hard and gray as granite. His manner was not that of a pleased and agreeable host. Margarita spoke first. "We have come to see your rubber trees, Mr. Ware. . . . Good morning, Mr. Ware."

He bowed gravely to her, and looked at Guimaraes narrowly. "Good morning. I am sorry, but you are in the wrong direction. . . . There's really no rubber to be seen here; the seringal is quite a little farther upstream . . . as I need not tell you." He still looked at Affonso Guimaraes. Then in a brief, businesslike tone: "Where's your boat? Let me put you on the right track."

"The boat is lying up the igarapé just in front

of your—your first palacete,” smiled Affonso. “You must be a very wealthy man, with two country homes. Will you not ask us in?”

“You must pardon me if I don’t,” returned Ware coolly. “The . . . as you see, there’s a fire, and it’s going rather badly. You must really excuse me. . . . I don’t quite understand why you came up the igarapé to get to the seringal. It would have been much easier to go farther upstream, and land by the big barracao: the collecting house and central store,” he explained to Margarita, suddenly becoming a little polite, but at the same time moving away from the second house, and almost pushing his visitors down the path. What was the matter with him? For that matter, what was the matter with Affonso? She said to herself as she walked down the path in front of Ware, that they both behaved as if there was something they didn’t speak of, as if they were thinking all the time of something else.

Suddenly an idea came into her mind, the remembrance of the abyss that had seemed to open under her happy feet a few nights before, the abyss that the words of Francina had pointed out, and that she had tried to forget. It was not true! She didn’t care—what did it matter to her? But it wasn’t true! Pricked suddenly into speech, she turned and said to Ware in a low, trembling voice, ashamed, but unable to check herself: “Tell me, I want you to tell me: that second house, there, is that—is it—is that Vicente’s house?”

He heard her with astonishment in the middle of his own annoyed distraction, and answered her as if he was satisfying the idle curiosity of a child: “Oh, that? Vicente’s? Yes, yes. Yes, that’s Vicente’s house.”

She moved on again without a word more, her face burning. She pulled her big soft straw hat down in front of her eyes, and suddenly felt two tears running over her cheeks. She was furious, insulted, shaking with shame. She had actually asked him, and he had dared to tell her. . . . She stooped to pick a tiny ball of mauve fluff, flower of the sensitive creeping mimosa, hastily brushed away the idiotic tears, and began to laugh gaily as Affonso, recovering his insouciance, told Ware of the gossip of the city, all the political news and rumors. The election was to be held in ten days, he remarked, and everybody was watching his neighbor. "Of course our party is going to win again; our people are all still hungry. And Evaristo is such an excellent chief. It's so clever of him not to be governor himself."

"The Souzas are all hungry too," Ware reminded him.

"Yes, but they are not nearly so clever, meu caro." He spoke with enthusiasm of the opera company, "the delight and pride of Manáos," complimenting the sisters with grace. Ware, too, as they approached the igarapé, lost a little of his abstracted coolness, although he made no effort to capture the attention of Margarita and still seem preoccupied.

The other girls called to him from the boat and they exchanged pleasant greetings; but he refused to accompany them. They must please excuse him: if he had known sooner that he was to be honored in this manner he would have been happy . . . but he had a lot of work to do in another part of the seringal. He summoned Vicente with a peculiar clear and shrill whistle and when the caboclo appeared running from the other side

of the water, a machado in his hand and a rifle over his shoulder, he told him to show the *senhores* the best path for seeing fine specimens of rubber trees, and to take them to see the nearest smoking huts.

He waved a cheerful good-by from the creek's edge, almost openly relieved to see them go. Vicente in the part of showman directed the boat's course back to the Negro, upstream half a mile, and superintended the landing at a point where a little pier ran out in front of a wide clearing. Here stood the temporary storing houses of the rubber, the family dwelling of the overseer of the *seringal*, and the little shop that sold a box of matches, a kilo of flour, or a gallon of paraffin at the highest price on earth.

Vicente introduced the party with great pride, and led the way through the forest. Domingos followed with Bianca at a whisper from Affonso Guimaraes, who, for once seeming ready to leave Margarita's side, quietly signed to his cousin Leona. She dropped behind with him at once, allowing Custodio to take his place beside.

Custodio, beaming upon the pale girl, introduced the forest with a generous hand. "Here is the great unconquerable, at the *senhora's* pleasure. Look at the high pillars and green roof! The forest always appears to me as a dim cathedral, the only one that our native Brazilians possess. The sole temple of the *Tupis*!" She smiled upon him without listening, rapidly making up in her mind a dozen really spiteful, barbed things that she might say to John Ware . . . no, she would never speak to the man again. Custodio was proceeding, delighted to have an audience for the reception of his theories:

"It may not seem strange to you, so young and beautiful, and do not think of these things, that our Indians have never built any temples to their gods. But I, an old man, think of it whenever I enter the forest."

(Oh, if one grew very old, things wouldn't hurt so much—what shall I think about when I am as old as you, Custodio de Freitas?)

"I believe very positively that the reason why our Indians never built temples, never had any acute idea of God himself, is because the forest dominates everything, divides them from everything else and from each other. It is the reason why they have never, here, been united under any one great king. The tribes are all dispersed and isolated by the forest, smothered in it; no single ruler could ever make his power felt over a great area . . . and people who have no powerful ruler never create enormous monuments. Those have always been erected by magnificent tyrants, inspired by their own fear of God's judgment upon their own sins, or to please their human vanity. The stone temples of the Incas, there just across the Andes, could only have been built under a tyranny. And here nothing tyrannizes but the forest. "Meu Deus! be careful! There's a band of marauding ants! Don't step near them! They bite worse than a serpent." He pulled the girl out of the way, hurried her almost to a run, much agitated.

The path they followed was a well-trodden trail, cleared of bush at the beginning of the rubber-collecting season by the expert *matteiro*, the woodsman whose business it is to locate rubber trees in a new forest area and to open the way from tree to tree ready for the rubber collector.

There was only a dim light, the sun filtering feebly through the tree tops clustered far above, often a couple of hundred feet above the ground. A damp, pungent breath, charged with the essences of rotting leaves, of flowers, of powerful drugs oozing from bark and roots, rose from the damp black soil. Great leaves, many of them cut out in fantastic patterns as if by some indefatigable dryad with a pair of stout scissors, let rays of sunlight filter through their little windows; furry brown ropes hung twisted from enormous heights. Here was the immense, warring life of plants and trees: but not a bird called nor was there a sign of any animal inhabitants. For them the forest was too deep and dark: only beside the water or along wide pathways where bright sunlight penetrated could such life survive the pressure of the forest.

Vicente, waiting ahead, displayed a big seringa. Its millions of three-fingered leaves spread, motionless in the hot, still air, above its great trunk, covered with the deep scars made by years of tapping. It seemed to Margarita, looking with respect upon this dignified tree, that it must be deeply injured by these numberless wounds. The little tin cups used to catch the precious latex during the morning's bleeding had already been emptied, and were standing upside down on bits of stick at the tree's foot like groups of some queer fungus. The girl refused to take the sharp little axe, but Custodio insisted on showing her how, gashed lightly, the tree yielded the white milk, sweet to the taste.

"Your heart is too tender, mademoiselle!" he told her. "Our seringas take a lot of killing. Believe me, that tree will stand to see your great-

grandchildren." They walked on slowly, Custodio reverting to his ideas about the native tribes, for whom all South Americans, at least theoretically, have no affection.

"It is easy to understand here, I think, that it is all our Indians can do to live from day to day. The forest is nearer than God; it takes the place of deities, it is unanswerable, there is no appeal from it. All that is possible is accommodation to it as best may be. The forest is the one great external power. It shuts out the rest of the earth and all heaven."

"People can't think of God unless they see the sky?" She thought as she spoke of stones set in wide open spaces upon distant moors, free to the sky and wind.

"Precisely! Here they never see the sky, and so they haven't even the simple fears of most primitive folk, the fears of lightning and thunder. No storm penetrates the deep heart of the forest . . . look up, dear child! Up there the tops might be shaken and beaten with rain and wind, and down here in the calm and dusk not a drop or a gust would touch your little head. No tempestuous, capricious god is here to be propitiated by prayer and gifts; and there is no heaven to attain. . . . Nothing but the forest all about, hostile, pressing upon them, a little toned down by daily contact, but never friendly or even indifferent. . . . Look, here's another rubber tree, not quite so badly scarred. We must have passed thirty other sorts of trees since we saw the first one."

"If your Indians were afraid of the forest they wouldn't stay in it," she objected.

"Where could they go except to other forests? They were born in it, it is all their world, present

and future. . . . They *are* afraid of it; in many tribes there is such a custom of fear that no man ever enters it alone. They seem to be always conscious that its life is as active as theirs, as urgent and determined, and very much stronger. The river is much more a friendly thing than the forest; it is strong too, but it does not harbor so many vicious attackers, and it does not press upon them like the forest."

"It doesn't press on me. I love it. It's so high and beautiful."

"A deceitful beauty! It enchants its lovers, but always devours them in the end if they do not run away. Foreigners always love it, and they who know it least are least afraid. . . . Perhaps only the man who is independent of it, whose springs of life and faith rose somewhere else, can afford to take pleasure in it. Or to set up their gods near it! Pará and Manáos, at least, have their temples on the edge of the forest, built by foreign hands that don't understand the forest. Temples to pray in!"

"For their womenfolk to pray in, you mean!" she laughed at him.

"Yes." He considered this. "Yes. Because civilized men always think the prayers of women more efficacious than their own . . . while the primitive people never let women come anywhere near their gods. I think they were right and the moderns wrong, too. All the liturgical incantations invented by men, all the discipline and laws—women are really quite outside them. Woman is the really free creature who keeps the world from being altogether trammelled."

"But it is the women who go to church," she insisted.

"Only because the men want them to, I am sure. Or else because they are unhappy and think then that perhaps there may be something efficacious. . . . No pretty young women, happy young women, are religious. You, dear child, so gay and charming, don't tell me that you really fear any gods."

At a branching path, where the sunlight descended in long shafts through openings made by the overthrow of a great tree, Vicente waited for them. An enormous black butterfly with spots the color of verdigris on its wings, plunged and soared in the patterned light; looking upward, long trails of gold-green leaves that appeared to breathe in that radiant atmosphere made fairy ladders to impossible heights, heights where a different kind of airy life existed far out of reach and sight. All about the spot where the tree had been cut out, quantities of chips of bright violet wood strewed the ground, coloring it as if a multitude of amethyst flowers grew there.

Did the senhores wish to see the defumadores now? They could of course walk through many more kilometers of the seringal and see dozens of rubber trees, if they wished, but one tree was much like another. . . . By taking the right-hand path they could reach a smoking hut in six minutes. . . .

Very well—if the Senhora Margarita did not want to follow the long day's trail of the seringueiro?

"I should like to do just that, just out of curiosity," she declared. "But this is much too late? I should have to begin before dawn?"

Indeed she would, Custodio told her. It was a terrible life! He began to tell her that he had

superintended the opening of a great tract farther up the Negro, back in the eighties, when the industrial use of rubber began to teach the Amazon the value of its wild forests. He had marched for days with the expert foresters, examining these huge, swampy tracts and marking out the rubber trees, and for one season he had acted as the superintendent of a seringal.

"Ah, what a life, to be a seringueiro! It requires so much physical labor in a region where sustained physical labor is almost impossible on account of heat and fevers . . . so much independent, individual effort, too, because each man works alone, and really no one demands any account of his task from him. If he brings in his big balls of black gold now and again, well and good, but if he does not, if he cannot, if he becomes sick and dies here in the forest, perhaps no one knows for weeks. It must be so easy to render up the soul in this forest, all green, green, in the midst of so much silence, in these vast dim aisles, I think."

He interpreted a murmur from the girl.

"Why does he do it? To get money? Sometimes he doesn't get any! That depends upon Hamburg and London and New York, senhora! And if he does finish his season's work safely, with even a conto or two in his pocket, he is likely to spend it all in a riotous week in Manáos, buying a gold watch for himself and diamond earrings for a sweetheart.

"For that he has spent six or eight months in the forest, perhaps, getting up every morning before dawn, walking possibly eight or nine kilometers gashing the trees: coming back to his miserable hut, dripping his own coffee, often

shaking with fever so that he cannot hold his cup without spilling—and then making his long round again in the steaming afternoon, always alone, collecting the milk, and bringing it back to cure it, drop by drop, a work that takes him for several hours, sometimes far into the night. And then to sleep in a hammock until it is time to roll out of it and begin again.”

She considered. “The rubber trees are so far apart——?”

“Yes. Because here in the forest the internal fight is still going on, the fight between different species of trees and plants. You cannot find here anything like your woods of the temperate zone, of just one kind only of beeches or oaks or pines, conquerors after a struggle of untold centuries. No, here they are still battling for mastery, strangling each other—look at them, choking each other to death, a hundred kinds within an arrow shot. Ah, here we are.”

At the edge of a little clear stream stood the smoking hut, a small palm-leaf erection with a pointed roof, open in front. In the opening sat a thin, hollow-eyed man, downcast, with large brown eyes that he raised with a concentrated, melancholy look to the visitors. He murmured a courteous greeting and moved as if to rise, but stopped at a gesture and went on with his task. He slowly turned a long handle resting on a pointed stake and bearing at the end a yellow-brown globe, darkening in the fumes of heavy smoke that rose from the opening in a tall cone. He dipped a cup in a bucket of rubber milk, poured it over the mass, turned it, saw it dry and darken, patiently lifted the cup again, adding to the ball, skin by skin.

As they stood watching, Leona and Bianca, on either side of Domingos Souza, joined them. Leona, imperturbable, explained that Affonso had felt a bad headache coming on, and had gone back to the boat to rest.

It was at just about that moment that Affonso parted the curtain of vines that shielded the second hut on Ware's side of the seringal, stepped lightly and quickly across the clearing, put his arm and shoulder to the door, pushed it open, and stood upon the threshold in a reek of pungent smoke.

John Ware, bending with absorbed face over something that he held in his hands over the smoke, started at this sudden entrance. Blinking at the access of light, he peered at his visitor, and, recognizing him in a moment, sat back on his up-turned packing case and waited. The Brazilian, remaining on the threshold, returned his steady look and spoke gently in slow Portuguese.

"My very good friend, will you not tell me what you are doing?"

Ware did not respond for several seconds, continuing mechanically to pull and twist the grayish lump that he held in his hands. Then he said in his cool voice: "Perhaps I don't quite understand you."

Guimaraes advanced a step or two farther into the hut, casting quick glances about him. The interior was rather dim, with two small openings high up out of reach, but he could see a couple of big roughly made tables, covered with neatly arranged assortments of little packages, heaps of nuts, and other objects that he recognized, as well as a bucket of rubber latex on the floor, and an array of bottles and chemical jars upon a shelf.

"Will you not invite me to sit down? I see the top of an inviting barrel, and it is a hot afternoon and I have had quite a walk. . . . Thank you. My friend, I do not wish to be indiscreet. But—would it not be better if you would confide in me?"

"Confide . . . ? About what?"

"Your work here."

"My work here——!" He glanced about with a smile, continuing to manipulate the elastic lump in his hands. "This is rubber——"

"Yes, yes. But, permit me! Here are sheets of crepe, here are biscuits of another kind . . . pelles . . . strips of caucho. If I do not mistake, there is a pile of the white hevea, the *fraca*. That must have given you quite a little trouble to get, here in the region of the black hevea. And yonder is an assortment of chemicals, and here are you, stewing over a lump of rubber as if your life depended on it."

"My dear Guimaraes, to take an interest in rubber and the different methods of coagulation, is not peculiar, not extraordinary, upon the Amazon, of all places?"

"I am not saying that it is a crime, but under certain aspects it might be indiscreet. . . . Can you smoke this black Pará tobacco?" Guimaraes offered his cigarette case to Ware. "Now we can talk better. Senhor Ware, I am truly your friend or I would not have come here. Let me lay my cards on the table. Then you will choose to put down your own, I hope." He looked pleasantly at the Englishman. Ware remained silent.

"This is what interests me, Senhor Ware. I must go back to matters of last year. You had an acquaintance, a person a little indiscreet, to whom you entrusted some specimens of your

work here, to take out of the country. He either knew or guessed something of their special object, for he talked about you and your marvellous experiments one night on the steamer, after he had been drinking a quantity of champagne."

He stopped. "Yes?" demanded Ware, curt and unsmiling.

"As you know, Manáos is rather sensitive on the subject of rubber—so somebody quietly searched his baggage, just before he got to Pará. And after that it was thought well to keep an eye upon your correspondence. Some of your letters were addressed to Ceylon." He paused and added a little apologetically: "This was during my absence in Europe. But a few days ago I found a file of records. Nobody had, apparently, understood. But an idea struck me."

"I see." Ware smoked quietly, his eyes fixed upon Guimaraes, who, after hesitating a moment, added: "The truth is, you might be in some danger here if your experiments came under suspicion."

"You are not suggesting any threat?"

"No, no! Hardly that! We don't kill people—at least, not in cold blood. But our citizens can be roused to anger if they are skillfully excited: and there are more than Brazilians interested in the good fortunes of *ouro preto*. There is all Bolivia and Peru, for instance; and think of the number of rich foreign houses here. For all of them, the high-priced 'hard fine' rubber, the supreme black gold, is the triumphant product of the up-river trees." He spoke very warmly, was silent for a few seconds, and then said with a friendly air: "I wish you would trust me."

Ware moved his packing case a little nearer,

and answered pleasantly: "Very well, I will. You have always been a sincere friend, and added to that you are one of the people in whom I could logically confide now, because you are, as a matter of fact, deeply interested in my success, on account of your family interests in the lower Amazon. . . . Supposing that there were discovered some means of making your *fraca* from the white hevea, all that output of rubber from the delta, as good as the up-river rubber? If there were such a process, wouldn't it be valuable?"

Guimaraes regarded him thoughtfully. "A process—things that you can do to the latex?"

"Precisely! Things I do to it."

"I imagined that it was something like that. Yes, of course it would be valuable. It would immediately valorise all the product of the lower river. And I, Pará-born, inheriting estates there, naturally take a delighted interest. But I cannot believe it can be done."

"I should not like to say that it can, in bulk or with the latex of all the 'red' and 'white' trees. Of course you know that that's the basis of all our difficulty with our plantation rubber in the East. We treat it beautifully, with exact science, and yet it still mills unequally, and hasn't got the elasticity and tensile strength of the stuff produced and cured here by the most primitive method on earth. . . . The plantation product hasn't the same market, on that account. That's what I have tried to remedy. I won't say definitely that it can be done in quantity. But I have great hopes. Look at this, feel it, pull it. That's the poorest kind of white scrap, after a treatment I have given it."

He handed Guimaraes the piece of dingy

substance he still held in his hands. The other, not enough of a technician to criticize this marvel, pulled it about a little and tried to look wise.

"This is the first time that I have got quite near the results I want. But there is still something to be determined. . . . If I had absolutely completed my experiments, and perhaps if you had been anyone else, I might have told you to go to the devil just now."

"As it is, we may as well go into this together. What are you going to do with your process when you have completed it?"

"I haven't quite got to that yet."

"Precisely like you scientific men with one idea! I suppose you would hand over the formula to some indifferent government bureau and they would put it into a pigeonhole for twenty years."

"Oh, not quite that . . ."

"Come, tell me, what would be the best thing you could do, to get all possible benefit from the process quickly?"

"Install equipment for treating the fresh milk in quantity," Ware said quickly. "Of course, that would be easy enough in the East. I should start to use it there myself. There the milk can be taken to central factories as soon as it's collected. It should be done while the milk is fresh, during the coagulating process, although I have got fair results with very poor stuff that had been coagulated ten days before—this for instance, from Santarem."

"Yes—I discovered a few days ago that you were importing rubber to the seringal," Guimaraes interjected.

"Of course, in your delta region, with the

curing done by individuals, in small quantities, and over great distances, it's a different problem. But even if it could be brought to central factories once a week. . . . It would have to be thought out."

"Very well. If you think that would be feasible, I will go in with you," said the Brazilian. "I will keep your secret, and I will find the capital for installations in Pará territory, if you will give me the use of the process on a business basis—I won't say in return for my discretion; I am really not trying to drive a bargain with you."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't," Ware smiled. "But I shall be delighted if you will undertake the active use of the process. I warn you that I do not believe it can be kept secret for very long, and personally I have no idea of making any mystery, after I am once sure that I have really got it."

"Very well. Then you would have no objection to giving me—I don't know just what it should be called? An option, shall we say, for the working rights of your method? As far as the lower Amazon is concerned?"

"Yes, if you will at the same time give me your undertaking to make all possible use of it. It is exceedingly simple . . . largely a question of manipulation. There's nothing needed but the proper machinery, a lot of water at the right temperature, and one cheap chemical."

Guimaraes took out a notebook and fountain pen and began to write, saying between sentences, "We can settle details and legal points later. But this will serve meanwhile. . . . No doubt you are right about the impossibility of keeping the process secret, but one need fear very few rivals in

industry on the Amazon. Everybody here wants to make fortunes by juggling with figures."

"You would have to start factories on a commercial scale. It means a lot of work in organizing. Are you prepared to do that?"

"Yes. I am not so devoted to politics. That life requires a special temperament. I wish to be happy. . . . Besides, I think our party is going to be beaten at the election." Replying to Ware's look, he added, "Yes, I know what I said an hour ago. But now I am telling you what I think. We are immensely outnumbered. Evaristo says he has something in reserve, but I doubt."

"Politics are a fearful bore," the Englishman thought. "Especially when there are upsets that interfere with your work." This was, in fact, his main attitude to political problems.

Affonso Guimaraes stood upon the threshold to get light as he wrote.

"For the present, my dear fellow, it will be as well to continue to maintain the same discretion that you have already tried to exercise. For, however useful your discovery will be to the world at large, we may be sure that our dealers in the famous up-river rubber are not going to be pleased about it. It will spoil their monopoly."

"Probably. Yes. But one need not consider dealers only."

"That is exactly my feeling. Still, until we are ready it is as well to be careful."

They exchanged signatures, stooping over an upturned barrel that stood near the door and served for a desk. Affonso, glancing out to the bright clearing with its ring of tall trees, tangled with parasites in gaudy masses, remarked that Ware had chosen his retreat well. "It's an excel-

lent place for experiments. No one has, I am sure, thought it odd that you should spend so much time here, and not a soul but Evaristo and myself has any idea that your doings might be of any special interest to Manáos. . . . The only person who has had the least chance of access to my papers is my secretary, young Souza, and he is too stupid to take any notice."

"You are sure of that?"

"Oh, quite! That's why I chose him. And because, too, he has for years cherished a passion for my cousin Leona, and therefore has the most urgent reasons for placating me with all the inside news he can bring from the conspiring household of his dear papa . . . ah, if he were only intelligent he could have been really useful. But alas! he is nothing but a pocket mirror as regards himself and a shadow as regards Leona."

Ware laughed, sauntering out into the sun with the young politician, who made his way through the bushes saying that his party would return from the seringal soon. "I must not keep them waiting. . . . I hope to see you in the city soon, my friend." They parted with a cordial abraço.

When the others returned from the forest to the landing stage, Affonso lay fast asleep under the awnings of the boat, lapped by the lazy little waves of the black water under the shade of arching trees.

XV

RETURNING from a prolonged rehearsal that had gone badly on account of the gaps in the personnel, Francina climbed the bare wooden stairs of the hotel, swathed in darkness by comparison with the blinding glare outside. She spoke over her shoulder to Margarita.

"How in the world am I to break it to my precious consort that his very prettiest chorus girl has vanished?" she demanded. "Did you hear what Laroche said? He's sure she has gone to that big good-looking Portuguese rubber merchant, you know, one of those amiable creatures who took us for a drive the first night? He's got a huge white marble house on the Flores tram line."

"Giulia seems to know all about it," Margarita thought. "She was frightfully excited, and said she'd had a letter, and Graziela was quite safe and very happy."

"Oh, good heavens! Safe and happy!" Francina cried. Then, shrugging her shoulders, she remarked that at this rate they would need a new chorus every ten days, and told Margarita to go and lie down for ten minutes before lunch. "I must see how Salvie is. . . . You look worn out, Margie. Don't you dare to get ill."

Pulling off her shady hat, she sauntered into the wide room where Salvatore lay on the tossed bed, his stretched figure dimly seen through the heavy white veil of the mosquito netting. The

shutters were nearly closed, but through narrow cracks poured shafts of yellow dancing light.

She stepped quietly to the bedside, parted the mosquito bar, and looked down upon her husband. His face, deeply flushed, was turned towards her. His eyes were shut and he breathed stertorously. His arms were flung wide and the collar of his cotton pajamas was open, showing the swarthy neck with its prominent Adam's apple. He had not been shaved for two days, and a blue-black stubble covered the lower part of his face; a mop of unkempt black hair was tossed back from his burning forehead.

Francina surveyed him for a couple of long minutes, her lips pressed together. Plainly he was in no condition to be told of troubles. An expression of distaste clouded her fair face, and, dropping the edges of the netting, she turned to go from the room; some movement caught the attention of the uneasy sleeper, and he suddenly opened brilliant, bloodshot eyes upon her, starting up from the pillow and at once sinking back weakly.

She stood still and spoke gently. Did he want anything?

"Something cold to drink, for the love of God!" he muttered, and added something under his breath as he began to shiver. Was he to lie there and die like a dog in this rotten place? The quinine—where was the quinine?

She looked about, gingerly handled the group of bottles and little boxes on the marble-topped table by the bedside, and stared helplessly at the labels. While she searched, Salvatore, with a pallid face and blue lips, shut his eyes again and seemed to sink into the bed, to shrink and become

bloodless. Rather alarmed, she went out: she would call the old woman who had been fetched to nurse him, she would send again for the doctor. Francina feared illness for herself and hated it in other people; it opened vistas from which she fled. Nothing but her instinct for outwardly at least doing the right thing ever dragged her to a bedside.

On the turn of the stairs she met Feliciano, greeting him with immense relief. "Oh, Feliciano, the senhor is very ill! Where is Maria? She should not leave him! Eating almoço? Do go and look at him, Feliciano, and give him some quinine. Stay there, please, and I will send again for the doctor."

Courtly, alert and efficient, the camereiro assured the lady that he would do all things on earth for her. The senhor merely had a touch of fever; it would pass. Let her not be troubled. He would go at once to him. She gave him a seraphic smile and went down the stairs, looking into the deserted dining room where a barefoot boy was hastily arranging plates with a tremendous clatter. As she reached the last step the Italian manager emerged hastily from the reception room on the other side of the little hallway, and clasped his hands together, bowing low, at the sight of her.

A thousand pardons! He was just coming to seek Madame Antonelli! He begged her most kind attention for a moment. He breathed this in a stage whisper, an eye turned to the door he had just left. If madame permitted, there was a messenger here, beseeching the favor of two minutes' interview. He was in the salon, if madame would condescend? No one should interrupt.

She stared coolly at the man, a little amused by his air of excitement about a trifle. "What does he want? You have his card?"

"Madame, he is from a very—a very distinguished—person, and if the lady will pardon, he has no card, only begging for a word, a moment."

Francina considered for a few seconds, then turned to the door, instantly opened by the obsequious manager. On the threshold she stopped to tell him to send the old Maria to her husband, and to forbid her to leave him, enjoying as she spoke the nervous anxiety of the man, obviously dying to get her safely into the room with the door shut.

Inside, the room was shaded, and at a far window by the crack of the shutter stood a very slim young man, a small-waisted dandy with a long melancholy face and dark eyes, of a type so frequent that she could not remember whether she had seen this particular youth before. He came forward at once, steering past the double row of rockers that almost filled the room, a large cane settee at the head of the intimidating array.

"Madame!" The young man stood with his tiny buttoned boots pressed close together, his hat upon his heart, as he bent his sleek dark head. Francina sat down upon the nearest chair and regarded him with inquiry. He burst into rapid French.

"Madame, permit me to convey a message. I am desolated to intrude upon madame in such haste . . . there was no time for writing! You are entreated to pardon the informality . . . of your great kindness, to forgive the apparent disregard of *les convenances*——"

"Don't trouble to apologize any more. You brought a verbal message. What is it, and from whom?"

Thus caught up sharply, the young man came at once to the point.

"Madame de Freitas begs you to take lunch with her. To come now, to her house. A carriage is waiting at the door."

Francina's cool blue eyes met the intelligent dark glance of the young man. She thought quickly. All this flurry about a lunch invitation from an old lady? But for Madame de Freitas, who she knew did not like her very well and who was the soul of punctiliousness, to send a hasty verbal message that ignored Francina's husband and sister, was a matter whose oddity was emphasized by this absurd agitation. She stood up and said briefly, "I am sorry, but my husband has fever, and I cannot leave him. It is most kind, but——"

The young man broke in. "Madame, I beg you! If madame will permit me one more word! His excellency begs you——" He stopped.

"His excellency?"

"Yes, madame."

"He is at the house of Madame de Freitas?"

"He will go there in a few moments, as soon as he knows——"

"I see." Francina smiled. She walked to the door and spoke with a calm formality. "I regret very much not to accept this kindness. But my family duties prevent."

The young man turned paler. His eyes were agonized. "Ah, but madame——"

She went on without heeding him. "However, after almoço I will give myself the pleasure of

calling upon dear madame for a moment if it is convenient for her to receive me."

She left him without another word and returned to the upper rooms, meeting Bianca on the landing and sweeping that lady in her wake as she sought the depleted company. A glance into Salvatore's room showed the old Maria sitting beside the bed ceaselessly waving a fan to and fro before the mosquito netting.

After lunch, a silent meal at which Laroche as well as the women displayed signs of wilting in the heavy heat, Francina waited for some twenty minutes until her party had disappeared into their rooms for the siesta, and then sent a message to the hotel manager to request a carriage. He came instantly to tell her, with manifold bows and sedulously blank eyes, that Madame de Freitas' carriage was waiting, having returned for the senhora's convenience. She stepped in and was driven through streets that blistered visibly in the drenching glare. Blue shadows lay on the sides of the silent and shuttered houses, and hardly a soul but some barefoot laborer was to be seen.

Arrived, she was shown into a long room that opened on to a wide veranda and garden, seen in green and flowery cracks through the shutters. Leona de Freitas, beautifully dressed, with her inevitable appearance of an expensive doll, came forward murmuring courtesies, her long white eyelids almost shut. She conveyed the apologies, for a moment, of her aunt, who was lying down, but would come immediately to express her great pleasure. . . . She melted from the room, and before the door had quite closed, it reopened to admit Evaristo da Cunha.

He stood still and looked at Francina; she sat back and regarded him with negligent composure, covering her acute curiosity.

"You are offended?" he asked very gently.

"I am not sure."

He came forward quickly. "Ah, do not be! If you knew how I have longed to see you—and I have been, am still, not only terribly occupied, but so much surrounded, so much watched. Already my admiration for you has attracted attention, and I did not wish to compromise you in the slightest. But I need your presence, your voice—I have been nearly mad . . . ready to risk almost any indiscretion——"

"Except putting your pen to paper," muttered the lady. But he did not hear her and went on: "Almost anything, to talk alone with you." He stopped, came nearer until he stood over her, and bending his head, whispered: "Do you know that this is the first time we have ever been really alone? Alone and out of sight of other people?"

He lifted her hand and kissed it, but kept his eyes on her face. "I love you, I love you," he said, very slowly.

"Is that all? You have said that many times when we weren't alone." She raised candidly reproachful eyes to him. "I thought perhaps there was something—that something had happened, of importance. That is why I came."

"There is. Or I should not have presumed to ask for this," he agreed at once. "Something has happened. A political matter. I am sure you would not care to know. But it is imperative that someone goes to Paris at once: to arrange a piece of financial business. It is immediate. My party wishes me to go——"

She interrupted him. "I thought there was to be an election? You are concerned in that? You must be here?"

"Yes, yes, on the twenty-fourth. I must see that through, and then go at once—if I go. There's a boat—the *Sonho*, due to leave here that day. It need not be known that I go. My enemies would make political capital of it. I can arrange that the *Sonho* will leave during the day as usual but will have a little machinery trouble and wait for me a few miles down the Amazon. I can join her quietly by launch."

He was speaking almost as if arguing it out to himself, and stopped at sight of her raised eyebrows. "You are wondering why I tell you all these details, this small intriguing. It is because I hope, I pray, I beseech Heaven, that there may be another reason for discretion than that of local politics."

Again she interrupted him quickly. "Are not local politics everything to you? They say you care for nothing but power. . . . Aren't you to be governor?"

"I? Oh, no! Never! Never! We are putting in one of the Guimaraes, the fat one, you know, Hermenegildo. He is vain, the idea appeals to him. But for me, no! One is too much of a target. It is so much better, so much more a permanent power, to pull the strings from behind the curtain. At least not to receive all the arrows." He had stood upright as he spoke, but now bent over her again and dropped his voice.

"But this Paris journey. I have not decided to go, in spite of all that depends upon it."

"What depends upon it?"

"You would not understand or care. A matter of finance——"

"How do you know I should not understand? You said that before. Tell me. I wish to know." She seemed a little piqued, and he yielded at once.

"It's a delicate piece of business concerned with a loan. It has been contemplated for some time. One can, madame, always depend upon getting money in Paris or London for any scheme so long as it is sufficiently far away from Paris and London. And we have had in view a most interesting plan for raising quite a large sum to—let me think. Yes, there are two or three great pieces of public work. One was to canalize all Amazonas in order to prevent the yearly floods. Another plan was to build asphalt paths through the rubber forests—excellent ideas, believe me. Nothing was done about it with our knowledge, though. And now we hear that the late governor presented the plan to some great European bankers and actually got an advance. Naturally, we are very anxious. We must find out, save what we can." He stopped again on seeing the trace of a smile on Francina's face, took her hand again, and spoke in an altered tone.

"Why do you not let me speak? Of the thing I want to say? Do you know why I have still hesitated to say I will go? Do you know?"

She did not answer. He went on, his eyes on her face: "Yes, you do know. Because I cannot leave you. Because I cannot see my life and yours separated, because I do not know how to face the days without the sound of your voice. The need I have for you, your person, your presence, is more than all the plans I have laid for years."

As he stooped before her, Francina looked across his shoulder to the long shutter, where a shaft of golden-green light filtered through a screen of leaves, hung with the orange-red tassels of some tropic vine. Her eyes rested upon the leaf mosaic idly, perhaps to avoid the small surrender of meeting Evaristo's insistent look, and it was thus that she plainly saw a gentle stir among a cluster of the foliage, and a dark eye that showed oddly for a long second before the leaves closed again. Someone was trying to listen, someone was spying there. . . . Did Evaristo know? He, the omniscient, in a house of his own clan, surely himself ordered any such work! She made up her mind hastily that the owner of the eyes was some creature of Evaristo's own possessing, and that for some reason a record was being made of this interview. She flushed with a mingling of cool amusement and genuine anger, but made no sign, saying when he stopped speaking, "You should not say this."

He accepted this as the proper convention and bore it down with enthusiasm. "I must tell you! Because it is my life, and I must make you listen to me. You *are* listening! Beautiful Francina, when I go you must come with me, with me, do you hear?"

She was taken aback by his sudden frankness. "With you?"

"Yes." He kissed her hands again and began to talk quickly, his voice low as always, his face very pale. He knew what she had said the other night, and she could make any terms she wanted . . . a divorce could be arranged, if she liked. Anything, but he adored her and needed her. As she listened, her attention half upon the gold-

green leafy shaft of the window, she saw again the stir of leaves as a hand parted the vine.

At once she stood up, backed away from Evaristo towards the window until her shoulder almost touched the shutter, and spoke slowly and clearly.

"Senhor da Cunha, I will try to forget what you have said. For a moment you have been careless of my position as an honorable wife, of my responsibilities in a foreign city, with my sister in my charge and other young girls——"

"There are not many young girls left to need your care, madame," returned Evaristo calmly. "At this very moment the little red-haired one—Giulia?—is being decently married to the agent for the Italian line. Come, I beg you, let us deal with this as between ourselves. Your fate is in your own hands. I am sure you know that I love you madly. I believe you like me. I offer you my life, I put myself into your little hands. Ah, Francina, most beautiful, I can give you love." He ceased abruptly, his voice trembling and gentle as he said the last words. Francina glanced at the leaves behind her shoulder, saw them flutter, and felt her vain and rather gusty temper arise. She had come here in none too pleased a mood, and the thought of this audience in the vines at the window, brought here for who knew what obscure purpose, annoyed and alarmed her. Some hint, too, of cool assurance in Evaristo's attitude, despite his words of humility, offended her. No harm, at any rate, would be done by maintaining a correct pose. She walked with dignity to the door and repeated coldly, "I will try to forget this."

Perhaps the politician regarded this display as

a *fit*a, a theatre play in keeping with the lady's value. He did not appear abashed, and was following her to the door when it opened and Madame de Freitas appeared, voluble, sharp-eyed, full of apologies for keeping her guest waiting, but overjoyed to see her. . . . She had had tea made à l'*Anglaise*, and it was just ready on the veranda. She led the way through a corridor to the broad and shaded veranda, hung with bougainvillea and coral vine and the orange-red tassels of some luxuriant creeper that ran all along the house. Recognizing this flower, Francina noted, making rapid calculations, that the far end of this veranda must open into the room she had just left. No one, of course, now stood by these windows. From the garden came two young people: the dainty Leona and Domingos Souza, he gaily refusing tea and making his adieux with ceremony. He was evidently paying assiduous court to the beauty, Francina noted, and decided in spite of her lively suspicions of everybody, that under the circumstances it could not be Domingos who had spied. "He is much too silly and too much in love," she said to herself.

Here, however, she wronged the young man. For, returning to the hotel an hour later, when all the colors of Manáos took on an unearthly loveliness after the withdrawal of the sun's glare, she stepped from the carriage to find Domingos waiting at the hotel door to hand her in. He bowed low before her, said simply, "Madame, my father is waiting to see you," and almost hustled the lady into the reception room. Looking at the bent back of the portly Domingos Souza père, it seemed to Francina in the midst of her legitimate

annoyance that these last hours were a scene in some ridiculous farce, in which she was always being hurried into rooms to receive the urgings of agitated gentlemen.

Her new visitor wasted no time in apologies. "Madame, I will keep you but a few moments," he assured her. "But when you have heard me I think you will pardon what would, without some good reason, be an intrusion." She nearly told him that she was inured to intrusions, but repressed speech for the moment, convinced that this man at least had something to say. She took the pins from her big hat and pushed her hair back from her face, chose the settee as the only firm piece of furniture, and motioned the elderly Souza to her side.

"No doubt," she said, "it is a business matter connected with the theatre. Tell me at once, please. I am very tired."

"It is a business matter," he said at once. "I will be quite open with madame. She has just rejected the suggestion made to her by—by a certain distinguished person. Madame, if you will change your mind, ten thousand pounds shall be placed in the London and Brazilian Bank to your credit at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

It *was* a farce. She resisted an impulse to laugh, and pleated the ribbon on her hat, remaining silent.

"Let me give madame a few minutes to think. I have surprised her."

"Nothing surprises me here," said Francina. "Naturally, however, I am shocked and indignant. Also, I am curious. What are your reasons? And first, how do you know that anything has

passed between myself and the person of whom you speak?"

The portly gentleman threw out his hands. "When one is dealing with such intriguing politicians, one must know everything. This person, madame——"

"Is your bitter political enemy," she broke in. "Why then, Dr. Souza, should you be willing to pay such a sum to—how shall we put it?—to help him to secure something he wants?"

"We are willing to use that sum to get him out of Manáos, madame. We believe that he meant it when he said he would not go away without you. He has a madness. It is not strange." She waved aside this rather heavy gallantry.

"Why do you want him out of Manáos?"

"Politics. Madame would not be interested." Again! Politics were not for women, it seemed.

"Under ordinary circumstances, no," she said. "But I repeat that I am very curious. Don't you think that since you make me such an extraordinary proposition, a distinctly intimate one, that you should tell me the truth about it?"

He appeared stung, grieved. "The truth! But madame! Have I not already laid my cards quite frankly on the table? We trust you very thoroughly, madame. Certainly I will explain more. Evaristo, now, has gone too far. He is not content with the swing of the political pendulum. He wants to rule. He and his party have had their turn, and he is persuading them to intrigue in order to stay in power. As a matter of fact, however, we can defeat him at the election on the twenty-fourth, and our plans are all laid for it. We are going to beat him." He spoke positively.

"Very well, then why are you taking any more trouble?"

"Because he will be enraged, and if he stays here he will employ all the months before we actually assume office in making trouble and plotting. If he's here he will never accept the situation. He is capable of making a revolt. He is a firebrand without fear or scruple. He might plunge Amazonas into disorder that would injure our international credit. . . ."

"I see. I am to take him away and soothe him."

"Madame," said the respectable-looking citizen, "you are the one person in the world, at present, who can do it. Please remember, our party is quite willing to be reasonable. We are perfectly ready to let him have the handling of the French loan—a very nice piece of business. And in a few years' time no doubt he will be in office again. But now it is our turn."

Francina reflected. "And for the sake of these political schemes, you ask me to destroy my domestic happiness," she said with a hint of reproach.

"Not unless the lady chooses," responded Souza père briskly. "We have also thought of that. We respect the fine feeling of madame. It has been considered. In fact, we will do everything to protect her, to preserve appearances. If madame wishes I will take the same care of her as of my own daughter."

For once in her life Francina was startled.

"Really, Senhor Doutor! I am to run away from my husband with another man and yet preserve appearances? How is that?"

The citizen mopped a moist brow, but maintained his even and businesslike tone as he proceeded to explain. "Madame could so easily leave the boat at Pará. Without observation: we could arrange that. And as far as Pará, and back again here too, if madame wishes, I will guarantee the companionship of a married lady of our party."

Francina looked into the anxious round eyes of the plotter, sat back in the corner of the settee, and laughed unaffectedly. "Oh, senhor, this is delicious!" She wiped her eyes. "Suppose I were so charmed with the—the person—that I didn't leave the boat at Pará?"

"That is entirely as the lady pleases. So long as we get him away from Manáos."

"But, finding himself flouted, he might come back from Pará."

"No. He would look too foolish. He could not face the town, because then you see the tale would get about. We should see to it that he was a laughing stock. Besides, if as I said discretion were used in madame's leaving the boat, he would know nothing until the steamer was out at sea . . . on the way to Europe, with Lisbon as the first stop. If madame will work with us, we can easily arrange all things; a reason for her family, for going to Pará, and everything for her comfort on board ship, where, of course, the person would be more than willing to agree with madame's discretions."

She studied the toe of her white slipper, and said in a moment, "I am very tired. Please leave me. I have much to do . . . the theatre . . ."

He stood up at once, but watched her face with anxiety.

"May I send a note—discreetly—to-morrow, asking for madame's reply?"

"Oh, all these discretions!" she smiled. "Ah, senhor, you are the enemy of this man. How do I know that things are as you say?"

He was agitated, roused to immediate protests. "Madame, I can prove this to you without trouble. Would you take the word of Custodio de Freitas? You know him better than you know me. Yes? Very well. Custodio and I went to school together many years before Manáos had any politics, and although we are to-day on opposite sides, we are still good friends. I assure you that he too thinks that the person we speak of has gone too far, that he is a too disturbing element. It is Custodio's group who want him to go to Paris as much as we do. They dislike extremes. Will you ask him?"

"Perhaps. I don't know."

Domingos Souza père took a resolution. As he opened the door he said in a low voice to the departing lady, "The sum I mentioned will be placed to madame's credit to-morrow."

She made no response, but climbed the stairs. As she reached the top Margarita met her. "Oh, Francie, have you heard about Giulia? Where have you been all the afternoon?"

"Talking politics. You would not understand," said Francina mechanically and with a faint smile.

XVI

THE next few days passed like a nightmare to the opera company. They gave "Rigoletto" on a night of oppressive and noisome heat, when malaria hung almost visibly in the airless streets. The going down of the sun seemed to release inimical vapors, and from the pavements the concentrated heat of noon rose in suffocating waves, so that the night was hotter than the day. In the theatre, audience and performers candidly wiped perspiring faces and necks, and although bouquets stood like thickets at the doors of the girls' dressing rooms, they were too much reduced in spirit to accept these trophies with coquetry. It needed at least a diamond ring, anathema to Salvatore, but not impossible now that he lay low, to win a smile from a maiden.

A day or two after Salvatore's collapse, one of the Italian girls, a tiny creature with an exquisite figure, took to her bed with sighs and lamentations that she should have left her beloved Rome to die of horrible diseases at the ends of the earth. The assiduous doctor pronounced nothing to be the matter with her, but she refused to get up. With Beatriz and Graziela gone, this left but one maiden of the chorus, a charming but voiceless little gypsy, for the eyes of Manáos.

Salvatore, fevered and fretting, alternated between days of raging temperature, when he became more than half light-headed and cursed

his transitory neighbor, and others of shivering subjection, when he sat, a bleached and haggard figure, by his balcony. He learnt the trick of tying a towel round his neck and right wrist to steady a shaking hand, and drank champagne on the advice of his Swiss friend of the boat. When it became plain that he could not summon sufficient vitality to shake off the fever, it was decided that he should go to Pará, to meet the incoming Italian boat, old fever experts of the upper river declaring that the recurrent seizures would leave him as soon as he was on the water, and that he would return cured. He was carried aboard a Pará-bound steamer with the young tenor to look after him.

The remnants of the company held council and arranged to give on the following night, instead of opera, a musical evening that would be a guarantee of good faith to Manáos. Some songs, a violin obligato or two, and a couple of scenes demanding only two or three voices. Laroche depended largely upon the kindness of the Amazon audience, the most receptive on earth.

But upon the morning of that day, which coincided with that of the Manáos election, Margarita opened her eyes and looked straight into those of her sister, standing with a pale and serious face beside her bed, a pink wrapper thrown over her nightdress.

"Francie! Is anything the matter? Is it late?"

"No, no! It's very early," Francina said impatiently. She sat down on the edge of Margarita's bed and folded her hands together in her lap. "Margarita, I am going to take the boat for Pará that leaves this morning." She delivered this in a cool, dry voice, looking full at her sister,

who stared in astonishment and made no response. In a moment Francina went on more airily:

"You'll be all right here. You can look after yourself——"

"Of course! You won't be gone long!" cried Margarita, suddenly seeing an explanation. "Oh, poor Francie, you are worried to death about Salvatore!" She sat up, her little nightdress slipping from her shoulder, her young face flushed with sympathy. Francina did not reply to this, but folded her hands closer and seemed to withdraw herself almost imperceptibly; she looked down at her slippered feet and murmured: "Of course . . ."

"How long will you be gone? Not much more than a week, if Salvie's fever is better, and the chorus arrives all right on the *Orlando*?" Francina opened her lips and shut them again without speaking. A knock sounded, the door opened, and Feliciano brought in coffee, his dark face beaming, his hair a mop of black curls. Taking her cup, Margarita was suddenly struck with a terrifying thought: "Francie! How on earth can I sing without you! And what in the world will poor Jean Laroche do?"

Francie shrugged her shoulders; her face cleared, and she dismissed the shadow that had hung about her. "He could arrange some other things," she said lightly. "But why should you sing if you don't want to? Let them call it off if you're frightened."

"We've promised," Margarita cried, protesting.

"Margie darling, do remember that there are much more important things in the world than singing—than singing because you've promised

to." She poured hot milk into the aromatic black coffee and drank little sips daintily. "Margie, you are going to marry Affonso, aren't you?"

Margarita laughed out loud. "Oh! Must I marry someone?"

"Yes, of course you must, sooner or later. You have to think of the future, dear child. You are not dreaming of earning your living—by singing, are you? Perhaps, with luck, you might make thirty shillings a week . . . I know all about that! These last four years!" She flushed: her eyes brooded.

"Margie, being poor, wretchedly poor, when other people have got things! I suppose it wouldn't hurt half so much if they hadn't. I don't believe you see them, now, but you would some day. . . . You don't want to go back to Sansoe and type out father's books for him, do you?"

"Dear Sansoe!" murmured Margarita, pouring sugar on her toasted roll.

Francina looked at her sister's face with a queer smile and went on speaking a little impatiently: "Yes, yes, I know you like it—but for years and years and years? How could you stand it? Don't think of it, dear. You are very pretty, really quite as pretty as I am, and the best thing you can do in order to—to realize on your assets, you see, is to marry someone, and now, while you have the chance, someone with lots of money."

Margarita did not answer, and Francina, looking at her steadily, delivered her creed evenly and drily:

"Do you remember what I said to you once—that it was only worth while for a woman to be a woman? I mean that from the bottom of my

heart. And to be a woman, really to get all there is out of it, to live without being limited and enchained, you have to be indispensable to a first-class kind of man. You have to choose carefully—class and ability, I mean; but not to permit yourself any silly fancies. They are only fancies, ideas that women invent themselves, when they think they like one man better than another, because all men are alike really as far as women are concerned. They are all children . . . but they have got the keys. Never have fancies about them, Margarita! It doesn't matter a bit about loving a man. The only important thing is that he should love you."

She added after a moment's pause, in a lighter voice: "Affonso is a very good sort indeed. He has been mad about you for ever so long. I should advise you to marry him at once, dear."

Margarita, rather inclined to tears although she did not know why, said in a little voice: "I hadn't thought about it, Francie." And then, instantly feeling like a baby, added hastily: "Affonso is an awfully good sort. I am ever so fond of him. But after all we are foreigners to each other——"

Francina laughed. "As if our family hadn't always run to foreign alliances! Religion is much more of a bone of contention than race, my dear, and at least you and I were baptized good Catholics, even if we are rather heathen."

As she leaned forward to take a spoonful of soft sugar from the bowl, her little pink negligee fell open and something that glittered swung forward. To Margarita's exclamation: "Oh, Francie, how pretty! Are they diamonds?—do let me look!" her first instinct was a quick gesture to close the front of her wrapper, but she changed

her mind rapidly and lifted the long and sparkling chain, a bright stream that ran between her fingers.

"Yes. They are diamonds." She added with a light laugh as she rose:

"I bought them yesterday." And went out of the room.

Margarita took her shower bath, dressed hurriedly in pale muslins, went to Francina's room, and found her packing with Feliciano's courtly assistance.

"You are not going to take your big trunk, Francie? For those few days?"

"I don't know if it will be only a few days," she returned impatiently. Margarita said no other word of inquiry, helped her, and presently they drove down to the floating dock. Francina sat back in a corner of the carriage, silent, smiling mechanically at the frequent salutes that greeted them, but hardly glancing at the streets. Arrived at the ship's side, she refused to let Margarita go aboard, kissed her hurriedly, told her to keep out of the already ferocious sun, to go back to the hotel and not to worry.

"You take life too seriously about *little* things, dearest, and not half seriously enough about important things, like your complexion," she told her sister, laughingly, her spirits suddenly recovered. "Good-by, darling!"

Margarita drove back with a sense of desolation that she told herself was cowardly. But Salvatore and Francina had gone to Pará, and she had to encounter Affonso, who had suddenly acquired the proportions of an engulfing sort of problem, and as to John Ware—oh, no! she wasn't going to think about John Ware, she said,

when stricken with the quick memory of a fair head that shone in the lamplight, and a voice that had said, so hypocritically, to her: "If—you want anything—will you call me?" She put this aside, and faced the thought of the evening, when she had to sing, without Francina.

Just when she was about to enter the hotel door, she caught sight of a man who trotted along the middle of the white-hot road, a net of charcoal and a bunch of half-ripe bananas on his bent back. Vicente! She hailed him as if he were an old and beloved friend, her face alight with smiles.

"Bom dia, Vicente! Did you come in to vote? It is the day of election, *nao é?*" She waved him into the bare reception room on the left of the door with its double rows of cane rocking-chairs, sat down and beamed upon the wooden-faced caboclo, airing her halting Portuguese while he replied in fragmentary English.

No, he answered seriously, he took no interest in the election. Of what use? It made no difference to men like himself. *A politica* was the business of those born to it. . . . He had come to get stores for the *patrao*.

When was he returning? Not until to-morrow morning. He had had to buy some things that would not be ready until then. Did the *senhora* wish to send any message? Oh, did she? It suddenly occurred to Margarita that she would, and then that never, never could she—and it was chiefly for the sake of saying something kindly in reply that she answered: "Perhaps. If I did, where should I find you?" The childish idea crossed her mind that she would send John's tie back to him.

Vicente was answering her gravely: "During the day I am much in the town or in my house on the line of the Flores bond; at night I sleep in the Bôto very far up the igarapé, where the patrao keeps it always."

"Yes, yes, I remember." She saw before her the little sandy path shadowed with dark trees and patterned with sunlight, and the eyes of John Ware, very blue and kind and comradely.

As Vicente stood, hat in hand, bowing himself away, a crash of bells suddenly smote the air, a peal that clanged a loud challenge. At that sound, a group of men, sitting in the sunny restaurant just across the open corridor, sprang to their feet, cried out with a smother of Portuguese oaths and exclamations, and ran to the door. Margarita jumped up and ran too, looking from the threshold into the wide square and seeing the figures of men appear at doorways; those who were walking in the road stopped as if electrified, exclaiming and calling out to each other. As if by magic, groups sprang into excited life in that blazing space, everyone with an air of wonder or extreme anger.

"What is the matter?" the girl insisted in the ear of the sleek hotel manager, who also came to the door, looking quickly from group to group, his lips shut. He answered her with a polite bow and a shrug; he didn't know—he was a *forastciro*, a stranger here, and their politics were nothing to him. The bells? Why, of course, those were the noon bells, yes, but it was only a few minutes after ten o'clock. . . . It was all some of their politics, and the senhora would notice that there was not a single man of the governor's party to be seen.

Having said this much, he shut his lips tight again as if fearing that he had already said too much, bowed again and hastily retreated to his inner fastnesses. A second or two later a man in white, his face distorted with fury, his eyes burning and his forehead covered with perspiration, dashed round the corner and ran towards the governor's palace. He seemed to see no one, pushing aside one and another who tried to stop and question him as if he were blind. His teeth showed in a kind of furious grin. As he passed the hotel a tall, heavy man cried out to him: "José! quem, meu caro? José!" and caught him with strong arms. The man, halted, made no resistance, but stood staring and trembling, his breath coming in sobs. As the crowd closed about him he seemed to recover himself a little, wiped his face with his sleeve, and screamed: "They have dared! The robbers! The traitors! Thieves! Plunderers! Creatures without shame! Ai, men have been killed for less than this!"

He stopped and panted, and then yelled again in his hoarse, thin voice:

"They shut the door in my face! They have the courage, the thieves! It is twelve o'clock because they say it is, they and their pack of assassins and bandits! In my face! It's twelve o'clock! Oh, the insolents!"

The men about him exchanged glances. There was dead silence and then some one laughed, a high and cackling laugh that was presently echoed from the group. The big man, keeping a clutch upon José, dragged him into the shade of the restaurant: "Come and drink something. It is no time to behave like idiots. Patience! Of what use?" Several of the men followed them

inside, and one thickset, pale-faced Portuguese, shrugging his shoulders, remarked in a voice loud enough to reach Margarita: "How much difference does it make to us? What matters the name of the man who holds the sceptre, or how he gets it? They all steal. Why not? There is enough for all."

Someone replied to him bitterly: "Certainly, if they had any reasonableness at all in their stealing. But they have no limits. Ah, we have never had any honest officials since the empire, and now who expects it? But after all there are limits. There is some decency to be observed."

A thin yellow-faced man turned upon hearing this: "Yes, yes, this is really too gross. You know, I am an Amazonense, and this wounds my pride as a citizen. Naturally, foreigners don't care so much." He glowered at the Portuguese. Someone else cried out from the inner room: "Evaristo had better be careful! It's all his doing. Pereira is too stupid for such an idea . . ." but now the hotel manager appeared and cried out: "Senhores! No names, please! A little discretion!" And the restaurant subsided to groups from which whispers and exclamations rose sullenly.

Margarita ran up to her room and found Bianca hanging over the balcony looking down at the square where knots of men stood gesticulating, their eyes turned towards the corner where the palace of the governor stood. Margarita said to her: "It's something about politics," and this was quite satisfactory to Bianca who declared with an air of national pride: "In Italy, if men got as angry as that, there'd be some knifing." She knew already of Francina's departure made

no comment, and looked with veiled eyes upon Margarita as the girl talked about what they would do until Salvatore and Francie came back. They went to look for Laroche, encountered him in the corridor seeking for them, and after a brief and almost tearful discussion, went with him into the white-hot streets, climbing the slope of the avenue dedicated to Eduardo Ribeiro to the theatre, glittering in the sunlight against the relentless blue of the sky. At the little tables set on the pavement outside the café on the left, as they began to ascend the avenue, there were clusters of men like bees, thickly grouped, buzzing with talk, their eyes glancing about them.

Laroche said to the girls, when they had passed with courteous salutations, that he had a little anxiety: the town seemed to be perturbed. He had been at the Bolsa Universal near the bond station when the cathedral bells were rung, and he'd thought for a minute that there was going to be a riot. The people there had thrown chairs and things about and said a great deal—what had happened? Oh, didn't they understand? He looked on them with the laughing superiority of the male who has a flair for politics. "The governor's party didn't intend that anybody should vote except themselves, so they opened the polling places at ten o'clock, with all their friends massed round the doors and rushing in and voting. When most of their party had voted, and the opposition was beginning to think it was their turn, they rang the bells for twelve o'clock and closed the polls. They say there was just one opposition vote registered. Crude, wasn't it? Amusing, rather; the baldest thing I ever heard of, but awfully childish . . ."

"What will happen? I wonder: I think it's a toss-up whether Manáos will show fight about it, or whether they will conclude—the ordinary business people, I mean—that it is a tug of war between rival politicians and no particular concern of anybody else's. If the commerciantes have any reason for taking sides, then there might be trouble. Otherwise nobody cares very much."

They entered the great theatre by a side door, and as he stood aside for the girls to enter Laroche ended with a loud sigh: "I don't care what they do! So long as we can get through without a disaster, dear ladies, and keep things going till the boss gets back with his armful of new beauties. Can you sing the mad song out of 'Lucia,' Mademoiselle Margarita?"

"I don't want to," she protested. "You know I'll do anything for you Jean, but . . . Let me try *Ritorna vincitor*: I always get on with the 'Tosca' music so comfortably. . . ." At that moment Custodio came in, wiping his forehead and apologizing; he looked quite yellow, his eyes smouldering in his head.

"Yes, I have a touch of fever," he said in reply to the girls' questions. "No wonder! These politics! I am in it, I can't say anything, but I think Evaristo has gone too far. However, what I came in for—I saw you from the top of the street—was to consult about to-night's performance. I am a little afraid of a gathering like this, a crowd, at such a moment. My opinion is that it would be wiser to put it off. I am going to see Evaristo now—will you permit me to send you a message a little later?"

"It would be a blessed relief," Laroche thought, but decided to run over some songs, in

case the theatre was opened before Salvatore came back. He took Margarita, very nervous, through half a dozen arias from their repertoire, remaining unsatisfied; heard Bianca with rather more content, sang his own song, *Dio possente, Dio d'amor*, interjecting speculations as to where Valentine's costume could possibly be, and sighed over a duet or two. Then he suddenly had a brilliant idea.

"Miss Margarita, an inspiration! You shan't sing these classic things at all! You are not sufficiently composed! I fear to trust you! But be happy—here's something you could do without any practicing at all. Your little French songs, the *Bergerettes*."

"Oh, yes! Of course! They all like French, don't they! All right, let me sing *Jeanne aime joli Jean*. What a good idea! What else? *Bergère légère* and that little *Jeunes fillettes*."

As she began to sing, a note came in by the hand of a messenger. Custodio wrote hastily to say that Evaristo wished the concert to take place, that he was quite emphatic about it. Custodio himself was neither well nor pleased, but he placed himself, his car, and all he had at the disposition of the ladies.

They went on practicing and arranging, the members of the orchestra now coming in. Bianca, always good-tempered, agreed to sing a duet with Laroche and the popular *Dormi pure, dormi felice*, and the first violin compromised on a couple of items. "The whole thing will be rather scratch, my dears, but they know we are doing our best, and they are awfully decent," Laroche said as they went back to the hotel.

Here they found a letter from Affonso. After

the performance that night, Evaristo and he were giving a supper, if they would all come? Laroche was pleased. "That shows they are sure the political atmosphere is going to clear. Evaristo knows what he's about. I like his nerve," he decided. "Now, ladies, please go and sleep. Everything depends on you."

Indefatigable, he swallowed a hasty lunch and rushed back to the theatre, while Bianca did as he told her, and Margarita lay on her bed watching the slow shifting of the blue shadows on the white walls.

XVII

BY the light of one swinging electric bulb and four candles Margarita dressed herself carefully for the theatre. The heat hung oppressively in the air, held close to the sweating earth by heavy clouds, and the strange smell of Manáos, the rank, all-pervading smell of rubber, came in at the open balconies.

In a state of excitement and suspense, she chose her prettiest frock of satin and pale chiffon, and with trembling hands arranged her hair high upon her little head. She seemed to have no thoughts left for Francina or for Salvatore: she did not think of Sansoe or even of Manáos, but moved breathlessly with the whole of her attention fixed upon the ordeal that lay before her, the first genuine test of her quality. Some spark of the curious exaltation that made so many people here forget any other condition or plane than that prevailing in Manáos had fired her, perhaps. She walked with a feeling that she did not touch the floor, her eyes rapt as she already stood in imagination before the faces that would, she was certain, receive her with smiles. She felt deliciously confident, could scarcely wait for the moment when she would step upon the lighted stage, a sea of people rising before her.

Bianca entered in a whirlwind of little cries and pink skirts.

"Carissima, here is a little box for you and such quantities of beautiful flowers! Ah, open thou the

box! I die with impatience! . . . Oh, may I? Are you sure? I would not be indiscreet. . . . Oh, most lovely! See, see!"

She ended on a little shriek as she tore something from its velvet nest and swung it forward on her outstretched hand. Margarita turned and looked, dazzled, upon a string of lustrous pearls, their satin orient glowing for all their milky whiteness.

"There is a little note."

"Read it to me."

Bianca brandished the folded paper, shaking her head. Margarita caught it and glanced at the carefully drawn letters.

"These you cannot refuse," the note declared. "For you do not know who sends them. But think, if you please, that they come from no presumptuous man but from the Manáos that loves your enchanting presence."

As she read she felt something cool against her neck and looking up to the mirror saw the fingers of Bianca fastening the pearls' clasp. She gasped at their beauty. Their pale sheen took on a warm and opalescent glow from her transparent skin. She let them lie, the color rising in her cheeks as she saw their completion of the picture she made, with their strange lustre of the thing that has had life in it and can still reflect life. She was quite oblivious of Salvatore and his growled warnings, and, entranced, could scarcely bear to take her eyes from her own reflection. Only the palpitating thought of her audience drew her to the wings, full of people, invading the precincts, bold in the absence of the dragon Salvatore. She heard as if in a dream their greetings and exclamations, the hurried directions of Laroche, took

the kiss of Bianca without having the volition to return it.

The theatre was packed. There were not many women, but the few who were there wore such dazzling jewels that flashes struck across the theatre; one young girl waved a languid hand from her box, covered with diamonds—Margarita recognized Giulia, late of the chorus; and surely there, near by, was the recalcitrant Beatriz Sforzi. A dark, stout man lurked at her shoulder. All the rest seemed to be a sea of faces. The governor's box was empty as yet. Her eyes were suddenly caught by the row of medallion portraits that had always held Francina's fancy; she decided that she would sing to them. If she could only make them smile at her! She laughed, quivering with excitement.

When, ten minutes later, she came on for her first song, she heard no applause, saw nothing. She stood flushed, lovely, a little slender figure on the stage. Her light voice, very clear and sweet, penetrated easily:

"Bergère légère, je crains tes appas! Ton âme s'enflame, mais tu n'aimes pas!" she sent her notes floating, clear as a bird's.

As she sang the last line, her eyes encountered those of Evaristo, leaning from the corner of his box. Affonso beamed and applauded frantically at his side.

As she walked off the stage, still almost in a dream, Laroche caught her arm, demanding in a desperate whisper that she should sing again at once. She went back and gave *Chantons les amours de Jean* with a mist before her eyes, overcome and trembling with the sound of applause. It was not until she went back to her dressing

room and let the maid powder and fan her that she recovered her full sense of reality; but when she returned after half an hour to sing again she was able to look at the audience and to pick out coolly other faces that she knew. Affonso, behind Evaristo, did not take his eyes from her face. She smiled at them both delightedly, now quite self-possessed, and continued to look at them from time to time as she sang.

"Dans le bel âge, prenez un ami! S'il est volage, rendez-le lui! Jeune fillette, profitez du temps——" She ran from the stage with her arms full of flowers, and cried out to Laroche like a child, "They liked me, didn't they!" He looked at her almost with tears, nodding, and she gave her hand to Affonso to be kissed when he waylaid her in the corridor near her dressing room.

"Thank you for your roses!" she laughed, radiant, her eyes shining above the flowers. "They say diamonds are easier to get in Manáos than roses!"

"Ah, because roses are not luxuries! They are necessities, for adorable maidens like you!" he murmured. "In Manáos, necessities are so much rarer than luxuries."

A few minutes later the performance was over, the last note sounded, and the audience emptying from the theatre. Laroche, observing them from behind the curtain, thought that they were long in getting away: groups formed, and in spite of the laughter and gaiety, he seemed to detect a nervousness, a tenseness, that he ascribed to the political feeling of the day. A trifle anxious, he watched the knots of men as they talked and gesticulated, noticing again what he had noticed all through the evening, the dark looks cast at the

box where Evaristo sat. It was not for some minutes that the deputy governor and his party moved from their places, apparently waiting for the crowd to leave the theatre. But when Margarita and Bianca, their light wraps about their shoulders and their arms full of flowers, came from the dressing rooms towards the top of the great staircase, they met the politicians, awaiting their guests. Custodio stood with his nephew and the imperturbable Evaristo, talking rapidly, his small face anxious. The three broke off the discussion and hurried forward with renewed smiles, and Evaristo, with more warmth than he usually showed, gave the abraço to Laroche and congratulated the remnant of the opera company upon their gallant showing.

As they stood talking at the top of the staircase, awaiting the signal for their carriages, it struck Margarita as it had struck Laroche, that many close groups and knots of whispering men stood together. She saw curious looks, furtive and menacing, sent upwards to her friends, and it seemed to her that these starers were much more occupied with the politicians than with herself. Her new vanity noted this with a touch of astonishment.

By chance, as the crowd shifted, the staircase was suddenly quite clear, and the group at the head stood apart in a blaze of light, as the people in the foyer looked upwards. A murmur ran through them like a breeze, and all at once some courageous spirit changed his muttering to a shrill cry:

"Ah, you band of thieves! You bandits! Thieves and cheats!"

Immediately, as if a match had been set to an

explosive, cries and shouts rose from a dozen points among the crowd, as the pale faces and furious eyes stared upwards. Margarita, paralyzed with surprise, heard a few yelled sentences and phrases emerge from the strange mass of noise that flung itself up in angry spasms:

"You are without shame, Evaristo! You ought to be killed! You are an insolent, defying us, making a mock of our simple rights! You stole our votes this morning, you are a thief. You have gone too far this time, you low conspirator! You are a traitor and a robber!"

A surging began, as men in uniform suddenly appeared and tried to hustle the crowd away. But this interference roused hysterical anger, and a quick interchange of scuffling sent the uniformed men to the rear. From the midst of the struggling mass a slim figure disengaged himself, mounting two or three of the lower steps and brandishing a paper in his hands. He shouted something that she could not hear, and hands dragged him back into the mob again as Evaristo stepped forward.

With a face composed as ever, the slight, insolent smile upon his lips, the deputy governor stood on the edge of the top step. His eyes were dark wells, as he coolly lit a cigar and blew the smoke downwards arrogantly. Affonso Guimaraes, much less cool and with more realization of the exasperation of Manáos, turned and spoke quickly to Laroche:

"Get the ladies away. Take them back to the reception room and wait there for a moment until I come. At once, please. These idiots might be troublesome, impertinent, perhaps. Go, I beg you."

Laroche tried to obey, taking the two women by the arm, but Margarita freed herself quickly, smiling and saying, "Nonsense. It's nothing. We can't run away. Leave me alone." She stepped forward, her face flushed and her eyes brilliant, making a movement as if to take Evaristo's arm. It seemed to her that this was part of the theatrical scene, that one must behave with spirit and dignity. Of course one couldn't run away!

Affonso, glancing at her, gently pulled her aside, threw himself in front of Evaristo, and began to descend the stairs, calling out in his clear and precise voice, "My friends and enemies, there are ladies here! Quarrel with us at some other time! Leave this until to-morrow, if you please."

The mob at the stairs' foot was silent as he came forward and spoke. For a suspended moment it seemed as if the show of ugly temper had been checked by this appeal to gallantry. But before this hesitation could crystallize, a dark young man violently pushed his way through to the front, ran up a couple of the marble steps, and brandished his uplifted hands as he screamed out in a high, furious voice:

"Ah, you, Affonso Guimaraes! You are as bad as your robber of a cousin! You are worse! You are trying to ruin all of us! You are in a plot! You are a traitor to your country! You want to ruin the Amazon, you and your foreign friend!" He stopped, gasping and shaking angry hands, and Margarita recognized with astonishment the delicate dandy Domingos Souza, transformed miraculously into an accusing fury. What was the matter with him? He, the stupid, the devoted . . .

Affonso, staring at him, stood still. They faced

each other, a dozen steps between them. No one else stirred. Then Affonso said sharply, "What do you mean? Domingos, are you mad?"

His secretary, pale, trembling, shouted at him:

"Do not dare to deny it! I have watched you, you conspirator! I have the proof. We all know about it! We are going to put you in jail, your company promotor and you! Do you think we are a pack of fools?"

He turned dramatically to the throng pressing up the stairs behind him and gesticulated:

"Look at him, my friends! This wonderful patriot! He has signed an agreement that will make you all beggars on the Amazon! Our black gold will not be worth using for ballast. I have a copy, I know all about it. We can starve when he gets his beautiful plan into operation. That's very easy. Are you going to look on like dead fish while he does it? What are we all doing, standing dumb while this man ruins us!"

His voice ran up and broke, and a score of voices rose in a clamor of sound.

At this crisis Affonso made one mistake and Evaristo another. Affonso, disdainful, his face a mask of contempt, made an insolent gesture towards his accuser.

"You were born an idiot, and you will die one," he spat out.

At the same moment Evaristo made a quick motion with his right hand, as if to reach inside his coat. It was the gesture of a man who seeks a weapon. At once a suspended storm burst loose. Hoarse cries and a hail of shouted words broke from the crowd; a surge of hasty movement swayed groups of the close-packed men. A wave of gesticulating individuals broke from the mass,

pushed together up the stairs, and a voice screamed, "You want to shoot us, do you? Assassin, take care! Get your new machine guns and turn them on us, will you? Ah, you can't frighten us! We are ready for you!"

While this defiance was hurled upwards, and before anyone could do more than realize the roused temper of the mob, a shot rang out from its midst. It went high, striking a lamp with a sound of tinkling, as glass fell in a tiny shower upon the marble stairs. Affonso turned and glanced quickly at the deputy governor, throwing out his arms as if to shield him, but made no movement to defend himself. Evaristo, his scornful face quite unmoved, stepped down another stair, and as he did so two more shots rang out in rapid succession, apparently from opposite sides of the foyer.

Margarita, staring fascinated at Evaristo's smile, saw it stiffen suddenly, saw him stagger as if under the impact of a swift blow. In a moment he recovered, grasping the balustrade and standing very erect. Shouts came from the group above him, and during a minute of fantastic nightmare there was a sharp interchange of shots, until Affonso, throwing his two hands to his breast, slipped and fell sideways upon the stair. As he fell, a trickle of scarlet blood began to run from the cuff of his left sleeve.

As if by magic, silence fell upon the furious crowd below. Wisps of blue haze hung here and there above pallid, staring faces, and after a second or two of agonized quiet, a man pushed out from the mass and ran up while three others rushed from above. In the stir, there was a movement towards the main door, as men edged their

way out into the night. It was as if a spell of madness had been broken by the sight of blood. The shouting opposition dissolved and disappeared, while the Guimaraes party, submerged by the attack a moment before, retook possession of the scene.

Margarita, released from the frozen astonishment that held her, dragged her arm from the grasp of Bianca, who hung shivering and crying, and began to run down the stairs. She hardly looked at Affonso, surrounded by stooping men who lifted and carried him to the foyer, but went instead straight to Evaristo, who still stood holding the balustrade, a stiff smile upon his lips, as men ran to him and spoke and questioned.

Quite close to him, she saw him shake his head, his eyes blank, and make a movement as if to descend another step. Before his feet the marble was splashed with the blood from Affonso's wound, below a mass of men bent over a recumbent figure. There was a bright glitter of uniforms at the door as a squad of soldiers pushed in from the dark. She touched Evaristo's arm gently, saying to him, "You are hurt, don't you know you are hurt?" and at that the deputy governor turned a strange bleached face upon her, a face from which all expression had been stricken but for the faint look of wonder in his wide-open eyes. For a second he faced her, standing erect as she gazed at him wildly. Then all at once he collapsed, loosing his hold upon the balustrade and falling as if some long-sustained inner strength had suddenly failed.

Margarita caught his limp body in her young and sturdy arms, knelt upon the step and lowered him to her lap, half seeing as she peered into his

face the thronging men who cried out in surprise and closed about her. She heard her own voice saying piteously, "He is dead. I am sure he is dead," repeating this gently and obstinately as a man with a face that she noticed was very plump, with absurd round eyes, argued with her, "Oh, no, mademoiselle, he is not hurt at all, you are mistaken, he has fainted."

"He is dead," she said again. She did not know why she was so certain, but she had known it from the moment that Evaristo had staggered under the blow of the bullet. She put her hands over his eyes as Custodio de Freitas knelt beside her on the narrow stair, opened Evaristo's shirt and bent over his heart. When he looked up again he said simply, "Yes, he is dead."

He re-arranged Evaristo's clothes, on which no sign of blood showed, and then taking the limp head into his arms, said decisively to the girl, "Go, go, dear child. Go at once. It will be much better. There is nothing to be done here. Go, I beg you."

Someone helped her to rise, and she stood for a minute looking down at the dead face, unconscious of the curious glances bent upon her by the people who pressed about them on the stairs. A hand touched her bare arm, and she turned to Laroche, as Affonso, his arm in a white sling, his face ghastly, pushed his way to the side of Evaristo. She withdrew quickly, and followed the unhappy impresario down a few stairs. Bianca, sobbing with long gasps as she held an end of her long scarf before her face, clutched Laroche's hand, but Margarita, half dazed, walked as if in a dream. Her mind seemed to search for meanings in a whirl of dreadful sounds and glaring lights,

and it was not until they had squeezed a way through the people at the foot of the stairs, oblivious of the looks that followed them, and emerged into the cool dark night, that a flooding thought of sudden clarity came upon her.

Her seeking mind had found the poignant, threatening thing that had been said. "You want to ruin the Amazon, you and your foreign friend! . . . We are going to put you in jail, your company promoter and you!"

John Ware, John Ware! In what danger was he, there in the forest miles away, unsuspecting of all this anger and trouble? Someone must go to him, tell him, warn him. Otherwise, those who were not his friends might reach him first. There had been murder. It was still in their minds, in their plans maybe. Her thought flew to him and clung, rejecting as without importance all the persons and the scenes of her old and new association and also a shred of cold hesitation lest the threats might be short-lived and empty, after all. She knew just what she must do, without a second of hesitation. She stood on the pavement and spoke quietly to Laroche.

"I have forgotten something very important. I must go back to my dressing room. Take Bianca home—she is ill, worn out. . . . I will get Custodio de Freitas or someone to bring me to the hotel. Go on and don't worry. Take Bianca at once. Don't wait." She was so calm and decided that Laroche made no protest. She slipped up the crowded stairs, ran along the empty corridors to her dressing room, shut and locked the door, and switched on the electric light.

XVIII

SHE hurriedly tore the glowing satin from her body, ripping chiffon and lace when the fastenings irked her trembling fingers, kicked the silver slippers into a corner, and tore off the thin, shimmering stockings. Then ran to her property box, fumbled in its depths, and brought out a pair of sandals, a blue cotton skirt and black shawl. She threw the shawl over her shoulders and head; her bare feet would give her free passage where satin shoes could never carry her unscathed. As she arranged the black cloth to fall low over her forehead, she caught in the mirror the reflection of the heavy string of pearls, a lustrous circle about her neck. Such a glimpse as that might betray her! She caught at them with both hands, broke the thread, and as they rolled on the floor she pushed them away impatiently with her bare foot.

As she glanced hastily about the room, her fingers upon the door—who could tell how soon someone might come! She must hurry, hurry!—her eyes fell upon the scattered pearls again, and for a second a feeling of wonder crossed her mind that only a few hours ago those round and shining beads had meant something to her, that they had really seemed important. . . . As she turned, she trod on one of the pearls, picked it up, and stared at it. There was a tiny smear of blood. Was it on her hand or the pearl? She shut her eyes, felt her forehead dampened, and, dropping

the pearl into her breast, turned the handle of the door and slipped out.

She made her way to the narrow staircase at the back; a light glimmered at its head, and this she switched off before descending. She felt calm, as if walking in a dream, and thought no more of the scenes of the day, the disaster, of Francina—her numbed mind concerned itself no longer with the immediate past, and little with the present, fixing all its strength upon one thing, upon the one object—the hut in the forest. At the outer door she stopped a moment to put on her sandals, then turned the big handle and looked cautiously out into the deserted space. Here all was silent, but she heard movements and cries that came from the front of the theatre. The night was dark, only the electric lights forming little pools of blue haze. She passed quickly, a shadow among shadows, keeping beneath trees, crossing side streets, turning north when she dared; she hurried past the gaunt piles and débris of the half-finished palace of the governor, intending to traverse the Praça 5 de Setembro, and so to come out into the Avenida Constantino. But here a group of men stood, talking loudly under a lamp. They caught sight of her dim, shrinking shape and called, jovial. She turned and ran, noiseless, like a frightened little creature of the woods, taking refuge in the shadows of the next corner, turning south for shelter. They did not attempt to follow. When she saw that the street remained silent and empty, and her heart had ceased its violent beating, she made her way across the rua do Progreso, and so at last into the Epaminondas. She was alert now.

Here on this wide and empty avenue the black

velvet darkness was a more unbroken mass; it pressed about her, the warm air an actual weight upon her limbs. The street lamps threw only thin fingers into the thick air. She hurried up the road, trying to keep her thoughts from the enclosure that lay at the top of the hill, but as she came abreast of it she stopped and with a renewal of courage looked at that crowded ground where so many people lay in a narrow space. Near the railings, a ray of light suddenly made plain a new opening in the red soil; it yawned, significant, waiting for its mouthful. Purple-black shadows lay in its depths. She shrank from it as from a blow, pulled the mantilla tighter about her head, and hastened on.

Passing the cemetery, leaving the rails of the car line behind, she walked quickly past the houses, breathing a sigh of relief when they ceased. Almost all were in darkness, but here and there a dog howled and once the tinkle of a viola came from behind a half-closed shutter. From Evaristo's big house, lights streamed. Many of the shutters were wide open, and from a wide room into which Margarita could see plainly came the click of billiard balls and the sound of laughter. Groups of people stood in that room, and as she passed, pressing against the other side of the street, she saw a man come to the open window and lean out.

They didn't know yet, she said to herself, astonished that all the world was not conscious of the violent deeds of the night. From this point pretentious houses ceased. She hurried, half running, down the long slope, tree-closed, and quite dark but for the pale mosaic on the pavement where electric lights pierced the thick

leaves. But the sound of a footstep made her leave this path, fearing an encounter, and she made her way in the heavy shadows on the extreme left, where the open ground seemed less dangerous than the opposite bank with its huddling cottages.

Suddenly a silver flood began to lighten the sky and she saw the rising edge of the moon above the trees. In a few moments the road was flooded with light, and, looking furtively up and down, she saw only a long empty ribbon. The single footfall had disappeared. It seemed to her that in all the expanse outside the city nothing moved or breathed but herself. Even the illuminated leaves of the Indian laurels were as still as death—as death! The air was as heavy as a wet cloth.

When, her feet flying, her breathing labored, she reached the crest of the hill, the moon was half hidden behind cloud banks. The electric lights ceased, throwing a final gleam upon the little water tower and the sandy road that ran off to the igarapé. In front, all was dark. Now the hardest part, perhaps, of her journey began. The road, suddenly losing all its apparelled dignity, ran straight ahead, dwindled, dropped, fading out among the trees. The forest swallowing this last trace of men's work stood in a solid black mass, menacing, a motionless host of enemies, armed for the quick overthrow of the weak. The feet of Margarita faltered and stopped at sight of that dark array. She turned upon the top of the hill and looked back upon the road along which she had fled, watching the diminishing string of lights as they ran back towards Manáos. Exalted, fevered, she stared painfully

into the distance until it seemed to her that she could see the whole of the bizarre, ramshackle city spread like a map, the city with its upstart houses, the glaring theatre, the countless shrieking clubs that stood open all night, the churches that meant nothing at all. Her burning eyes seemed to look through walls and roofs. She saw into the pillared hall, the white staircase with its new sinister stains of red; she saw beyond to the line where the black river ran past, eternal barrier, eternal voyager, enclosing the little scrap of soil where men from all over the world toiled like ants and conspired and fought and wrecked their minds and bodies for the sake of a handful of gold to spend on vain rubbish . . . as pearls? She saw the shining things scattered upon a polished floor.

Almost up to her feet ran the work of these struggling men, planning their little roads, carving out a fevered market place, piling up stones to make houses, insolently floating their cockleshell boats upon the great river, sending men into the multitudes of trees to steal from those giants; and while they labored, the silent and apparently submissive nature triumphed over those puny efforts. Here were forever on guard the double lines of forest and river, strong, immutable; not things without sentience, not undirected, but part of all life, majestic in power and silence.

A dank and chilly wind suddenly blew. Shivering, she stood erect from the tree where she had leaned her tired body, and with an effort withdrew her mind. "I must go on, I must go on," she said to herself. "I must find him, I must tell him." She turned her face to the forest and moved a few steps towards it, as the moon came gallantly out, sailing in a clear sapphire sky.

Sheets of silver-blue light flooded the massed tops of the forest trees, enormous waves of hazy blue-green. Into that waste of verdure she must go, and quickly. Somewhere stretched the little path, somewhere she must find the creek; she must find the boat, seek the island and the little hut. The hut! To her shaken heart, the hut that sheltered Ware was a haven. Her thought ran to it and rested in it with a sense of measureless comfort. Where did it lie—in all those swaddling mazes of forest?

“I will find it,” she said, to spur the courage that sank at sight of that illimitable sea of tree tops. There, to the west, where the forest dipped into a crease, lay the black river; she followed the fold with her eyes, as if trying to pierce the network of forest and waterways, her mind seeking. As she looked, the moonlit mist that hung above the trees seemed to melt at a distant point. She saw plainly a little group of friendly trees, their leaves dancing over golden fruit. Now the trunks fell gently apart, and she saw directly into the heart of a tiny clearing—a clearing, or a garden? Bright flowers shine as if in the sun, there is a sharp-sweet scent as of heather, white walls of a cottage gleam between the bushes; a thin wisp of blue smoke drifts upwards.

While she stood staring, but without any feeling of surprise, a clamor sounded, the crash of bells from the city calling midnight. Her mind came quickly back to the road on which she stood. “I am dreaming. It was the house of faëry. I am dreaming,” she said to herself, but now took up her march extraordinarily comforted.

As she entered the woodland she saw that it was not quite dark. The path was broad enough

to permit the moon to push through the branches, creating lacy silver-and-black patterns on the path. As in the forest by daylight, there was a pervading silence, but now and again this silence was broken by strange sounds that did not seem to be made by any animal. From some distance there once came a crashing noise, as if some beast moved a clumsy body through the undergrowth, and once a strange moaning cry sounded that rose and shrilled and died away as suddenly as it had begun. She knew that this part of the forest was too near the city for any fear of encountering dangerous wild creatures, but involuntarily thought of the great snakes that lived in the Amazonian fastness, of the vengeful anta with her tearing claws, of the little jaguar, but she thought of them as things belonging to another life: she was sure that nothing would harm her, that nothing would touch her. Not only was she convinced, now, that she would safely find Ware, but as she left the troubled city farther behind her spirit of the country girl returned, and she felt herself calmed by the contact of the trees; they stifled her, she longed for open spaces, but they were not unfriendly and she could not fear them.

She walked hurriedly, the damp cold penetrating her clothes, her bare arms chilly; she wrapped them as well as she could in the heavy mantilla. She could not really cover the ground quickly when the path grew narrower and the trees met more thickly overhead, for she feared to miss the little pathway in the shadows that ran off to the igarapé. She remembered John's warning that the path was nothing but a tiny grass-grown track.

In the end, she found it by chance, when, stopping to fasten one of her sandals, she leant her hand against the trunk of a tree, and felt it scored with deep notches. Turning now to the left, she almost felt her way along the new track, carefully, lest an unguarded step should send her wandering among the maze of trees, to lose her way. But feeling tree after tree with her outstretched hand, taking each step slowly, avoiding the openings between the trunks where there was heavy undergrowth covered with thorns or vine-matted, she managed by good fortune to keep upon the trail. It presently led her down a gentle slope, at whose bottom she heard the secret rustling of water against water plants.

A moment more and she knelt at the edge of the tiny stream, bathing her hands, thinking with longing of clear brooks upon distant moors, where one might drink fearlessly. It was very dark and still. No moonlight penetrated here. The boat—how could she find it? It should lie somewhere under this bank. She began to grope her way along the edge of the water, peering at its dead black surface, when suddenly a voice cried: “*Quem vae?*” Her heart stopped beating, but risking all she murmured: “*Vicente!*” and heard with a violent reaction of feeling his quick exclamation, “*Deus! Senhora Margarita!*”

She trembled, clutching a bough for support, tears in her eyes. Before her a twinkling light rose, as Vincente swung a lantern aloft, illuminating his dark, wooden face. She saw in a few seconds that he was standing upright in Ware’s motor boat, moored so that it lay in the middle of the narrow stream. He smiled upon her, covered the light again with instinctive prudence, seized

his paddle and made a couple of strokes. Then he jumped ashore and stood before her, remarking cheerfully, "It is good that you spoke soon, senhora. I heard the small voice of your coming, and did not know . . . I make ready a gun. It is well. I am at your orders."

"I must go at once to find the Senhor Ware, quickly. It is of very great importance," she said, wiping the tears from her eyes. The caboclo, regarding with intelligent eyes the lady of his lord, made no demur, but pulled the boat's side close to the shelving margin, and helped her to step in. The blackness of the forest was only faintly broken by the sheen of the water, but he busied himself with the machinery without hesitation, using his hurricane lantern rarely. He started the engine and in a few minutes the little craft began to move down the narrow igarapé towards the Negro, with what seemed to the girl like a terrible noise, echoing in that dark and silent woodland.

Vicente appeared to steer by instinct, for to Margarita there was no light or any other guide. But in a short time the waterway grew wider, a pale reflection from the sky reached the surface. She could make out dimly, as they crept onwards, the shapes of other boats moored to the banks, and the looming bulk of houses. Here Vicente increased his speed and they shot past the fringe of the city, where lights still moved. When, with the engine purring, they entered the broad waters of the Negro he turned upstream, almost due west, and, hugging the left bank, began to make for the islands.

Margarita sat huddled in her shawl, peering into the night. When she asked the caboclo if

they could reach the senhor's house before dawn he smiled with a flash of white teeth and responded with his unfailing cheerfulness, "Sim, senhora! I make all possible!"

He handed her a rug and begged her to cover herself against the chill of the early hours, "um frio muito perigoso"—a very dangerous cold, and as the stars paled he ran the Bôto faster in the wide and silent river. A flush suffused the east as he traversed the water path between the two islands directly across the river, and turned again upstream near the right bank. Suddenly, against a sky of trembling gold, she saw the rocky spit with a cluster of upright trees that marked the screened entrance to Ware's forest dwelling.

XIX

WARE, returning to his hut after an early visit to the seringal that morning, was met by a figure that rose from the side of the path and greeted him calmly. "The Senhora Margarita is here." He smothered an exclamation at this news. "Did she tell you why, did she say anything?" No, she hadn't said anything, she only told him to come quickly. Nothing was strange to Vicente's quiet mind, apparently.

Striding hastily to his shelter, Ware stopped with a hand upon the frail door, his eyes caught by something round and lustrous that lay on the hard mud floor's edge. He picked it up—a pearl, with a little brownish stain on one side. Gently pushing the door wider, he saw a little hand that hung over the border of his hammock in the dim interior, a hand with a turquoise ring on the little finger. It drooped, innocent, trusting, as if belonging to someone who slept. He stood still for quite a whole minute, perhaps because he could not see very well in that dark hut, after the bright pearly lights of the young morning. Then he retreated, arranged the door to keep out the light, and began to busy himself with a pan of charcoal outside.

He boiled water, took newly pulverized coffee in a small bag, dripped the steaming water through it, and then went quietly and looked through a crack in the door. Perhaps it was the aroma of the coffee that waked the girl; she

opened her eyes, raised her head; he came quickly to her side.

"Don't move. Drink this first," he said, an arm behind her shoulders. She drank obediently, like a child, now and then raising big eyes to his face over the rim of the cup. When nothing but sugar was left at the bottom, he said: "Very well. Now . . . did you come to tell me something, Margarita?" And at this, tears filled her eyes.

"Yes. Let me get up, John." She swung her feet to the floor, sat on the edge of the hammock, and began her story. Ware, stroking her hands as if she was a child, listened to her tale of the election, the scene in the theatre, the shooting. He exclaimed at this last, "Oh, my poor little dear!" but otherwise sat listening, nodding from time to time, and saying at the end, "Yes, there was always the chance of trouble, if somebody got excited. Evaristo risked too much. He flouted them with his election practical joke. And then that wretched little Souza . . . I am awfully sorry about Affonso. You are a very brave girl. . . . Now, you must eat something. Vicente is getting some breakfast ready. Stay there and I will bring you some water and a towel."

He fetched water from the river in a big gourd, and a linen towel, and then stood gravely holding his little square inch of mirror while she took down her ruffled hair, braided it, and threw it hanging over her shoulder. Then Vicente brought rice and black beans, steaming fish stewed with pimentos, some sour red fruit mashed up with sugar; and they ended the meal with more little cups of black coffee. When Vicente was washing up, by the simple expedient of dipping the plates in the stream, she said to John:

"What are you going to do?"

"If it wasn't for you and my work, it would be simple," he said. "I should of course go back to Manáos at once and find out what they had to say. But with a political upheaval, and Affonso knocked out for a time, I don't know if I could get a fair hearing in their present mood. They need time to get cooled off. I could probably talk to the Brazilians, if it weren't for the political complication—but the merchants . . . I doubt it. And this is just the moment when I can't take risks, because yesterday, by the irony of fate, I was able to decide that I had really got my work done—found out how to do it without any mistake—at last. If they asked me, I should certainly tell them so, and then there might be more trouble. Of course, I may be mistaken, but I don't think so; I think I have got it . . . I must get that process, the whole thing, into the hands of the people who can use it, at once. That is easy for me. But Margarita, what am I going to do with *you*?"

She answered with a question: "What are *you* going to do?"

"I am going to borrow a boat, a good-sized canoe, belonging to Vicente's brother, and run down direct from here to Pará, where I can take a steamer without trouble. I can keep out of the usual channels, most of the time. I could do it in the motor boat quicker, but I don't know if I can run the risk of their looking out for the Bôto. Rafael's igarité has a covered end, quite comfortable, and a sail, and we are all decent paddlers."

"You must take me with you. I am a good waterman too," she said.

He considered this. "I realize that it wouldn't

be very agreeable for you to return to Manáos. But think carefully! You are not stupid, Margarita, and you must consider. . . . I could, you see, send you back at once with Vicente in the Bôto."

"Wasting your time if you waited until Vicente got back."

He shook his head. "I should not wait. It would be risking things. Perhaps he couldn't get back at all."

"You needn't think of it. I am not going back to Manáos. It would be dreadful. No! And remember that it wouldn't be at all easy. I have been missed by this time. I could scarcely go in by Manáos' front door, in your boat, by daylight, with alpargatas on my feet? And you are not asking me to return by night, the way I came?" She shuddered. Then said meekly:

"At Pará I should find Francina. And I could take a steamer home, too."

He walked to the door and stood looking out. The little clearing was flooded with sun. Bright dappled woods closed it in, birds called and whistled gaily; a cashew tree in scented flower threw patterned shadows over the hut.

"Very well."

She regarded the back of his head, stood up, came towards him. "You are not very anxious for my company."

"I will tell you about that at Pará," he said drily. "You are a very serious responsibility." He gave her a quick glance. "I must think for you."

"At least say you are glad I came."

"Margarita, dear, be careful what you say to me." Then, obeying, perhaps, an irresistible

impulse, he turned and came close to her, began to speak hurriedly: "You know very well that I adore every bit of you, from your dear feet to the top of your head. I believe you love me too, or you wouldn't have come here to me. You look like a child"—and she did look very much a child—standing there with short blue skirt and bare feet, and a little white camisa thing showing her white arms, and her hair down her back—"You look like a little girl, and yet I am horribly afraid of you, Margarita . . . because I know that you are not a little girl, and you seem to me like the sun and moon and all the earth and everything sweet and desirable in the world. I am madly in love with you, and you know it . . . I have never known how to keep my hands from you, Margarita.

"I may have lots of money soon: but perhaps not. Would you marry a poor man?"

She did not answer, but the look in the eyes she kept on his must have told him something, for with a quick exclamation he put his hands on her shoulders.

Holding her close, he kissed her, swiftly and almost violently, she making no sound nor sign, except a quick smiling gasp. Then he released her, dropping his hands and going hastily out of the door.

XX

AN hour later Ware came back to the hut door and told her that the Bôto was ready.

"We have packed and stowed on board all the things we need take, and you luckily haven't got any packing to do," he said, cheerful and comradely. He took down the heavy cotton hammock, rolled it up to go under a seat of the motor boat, and as he walked beside the girl to the water's edge he told her of their chief problems.

"My brave dear, we have a few things to consider. Not very big difficulties, but if I am going to run off with you to Pará it would be rather ignominious to be caught on the way. . . . Do you hear my friends the trupials calling good-by from that tall tree? . . . You see, the quickest way to descend the river is to use the motor boat. But she is too light for risking squalls and snags in the central current, while if we hug the banks we lose time. Give me your hand it's steep here."

They stooped under a vine curtain hung with purple flowers, and as Ware held back the trails from the girl's head it seemed to him that there never had been so heart-rendingly beautiful a thing as her pale face. He looked away and went on speaking steadily.

"Any old tub of a steamer can get down from Manáos to Pará in two days if she runs in mid-current. We can do it, too, if we take two risks: being recognized, and getting smashed up. The Amazon's pretty dangerous, what with shallow

runs, and floating trunks, and the *enchente* from the upper reaches when the snow melts, and sudden squalls and rains. Dangerous for little craft, I mean. The question is whether we should do better to use the motor and keep out of the Amazon, working through by some of the side channels—there are scores of them—or to go straight down the river in one of the covered river craft that wouldn't be noticed. It would be all right if we could take it easily, but probably we haven't got time to be careful."

"You think they'll be looking out for us?"

"I don't know. If that Souza crowd gets worked up, you can't tell. Anyway, if they come here they won't find much. And I doubt if anyone besides Guimaraes knew exactly where this hut stands." He dismissed this and returned to the idea of the journey.

"If we don't use the motor boat, we must do what I first thought of—go down in Rafael's *igarité*: and probably the best thing to do is to start out with both of them, the Bôto towing the canoe. Rafael lives on a little lake on one of these intricate water paths between the Negro and the Alto Amazonas, and I don't know even whether he's at home or not. I have sent Vicente ahead in his own canoe to tell his brother to get ready, if he is there. We'll follow in the Bôto. Here we are: the sooner we start the better." He tossed the hammock into the boat, shadowed under great trees.

"I can be your assistant engineer," she reminded him as he helped her in. "You know I am at home on the water, in any kind of craft almost."

He started the mechanism, turning his head to

say: "We can't tell until we try it whether there is enough water for the Bôto all the way through this igarapé. But this time of the year there ought to be lots of water; usually, so many channels would be flooded that we could take any one of a dozen ways through to the Amazon. . . . Sit well under the awning, dear. . . . But we have had so little rain this year, and of course none of the Andes snow has melted yet. You see the sandbanks are not submerged altogether, and generally by this time you couldn't see a bit of them, and the water would be a foot or two up the tree trunks. It has been extraordinarily dry."

The Bôto began to move forward along the path of the black water. As they left the little clearing and entered deeper shadows, they both looked back at it. The sun was brilliant in that airy space. All the birds were silent now, withdrawn to their shady retreats in the upper branches, but a few cicadas strummed lazily and beside the moist edge of the water a myriad butterflies in gold and green panoplies fluttered or settled to suck the moisture. The tall, pale-stemmed trees, the bright flowers that hung wherever the sunlight could reach them, the deep and dark array of the farther forest across the backwater, and the clear, burning blue sky, made a series of bright pictures.

How much water did the Bôto draw, Margarita wanted to know. Less than a couple of feet, Ware told her, so he thought they could make it. "But if we do get stuck we shall have to wait until Vicente comes to meet us with his little montaria. Heaven send we don't miss him through these interminable water paths. Margarita, I am regarding this as an elopement, and it's the only

one I shall ever have. So if you do really want to come with me, pray to all your stone gods that the water's thirty inches deep."

He steered his boat southwards, following the windings of the dark creek, and leaving the main body of the river Negro to the north. The sun-flecked, tree-shaded channel, appearing at first scarcely wide enough to permit the passage of the Bôto, presently spread out into a wide and still lagoon, brooding, silent, deeply shadowed by huge forest trees that stood with their stately trunks rising stark from the motionless water. These trunks reached upwards like enormous pillars without a break until finally, at a great height, they spread in a heavy mass of leaves that completely blotted out the sky. There was no sound from forest or water except when some creature of the igapó, a turtle or a fish, flopped lazily and sent rings rippling over the black surface.

It seemed as if these dim retreats were almost untenanted but for the struggling masses of verdure that climbed and twisted upwards. The trees were of many kinds; here were the tall pale stems of cecropias, bearing long thin branches terminating in palmate leaves with silver backs; there, dark-green trunks, jostled by palms with menacing spines covering their frailness. The smooth-barked trees shot up in long clean lines, their tops lost in the lofty maze; but those with rough trunks were hosts to masses of air plants with dangling roots and large fantastic leaves, to the polished greenery of the orchids, thousands of clustered ferns and the matted ropes of innumerable lianes. When, here and there, flashes of sunlight penetrated, these dense masses at once took on brilliant hues, with the different shades of

green, the scarlet tufts of the tillandsias, and the sudden splendid glow of pink or yellow or pale violet of a high-perched orchid.

Traversing rapidly this silent, ink-hued lagoon, Ware steered the Bôto to a tiny passage that opened out in what seemed like an impervious wall of bushes twined with a tangle of vines. The water lane was here so narrow that the sides of the boat touched the bushes and big, rank ferns brushed their rust-tipped fronds against it. Lusty liliaceous plants with emerald velvet leaves stood in ranks in the shallow water, without motion in that brooding fastness.

This lane in turn presently widened to a pretty pool, open, sunny, with bright green grassy sides that looked like some familiar pasture; it was when they were about halfway across that the Bôto's speed suddenly lessened. She spluttered and stopped. Through the water Margarita, peering over the side, saw lush weeds that seemed as if they had been only lately submerged; the whole place was like a meadow, lightly flooded and enclosed with pleasant woods. Ware left the wheel and hung over the stern. "The propeller's got tangled up with these confounded weeds. I'll get out and clear it." He kicked off his shoes and climbed over the side.

"I can help you."

"Oh, no! You stay where you are. This water looks all right, but there might be piranhas or something . . . your foot is scratched already." He tore away the matted tangle of strong weeds, climbed back into the Bôto, and started the engine again. "I'm afraid there isn't very much water here," he said, taking the boat slowly and keeping well to the center. There was no current

in this flood, and no signs of shoaling were visible, but all at once the boat's speed was checked again just as a car might be by a sudden touch of the brake. "Hang it! We've touched bottom," Ware owned. Over the stern the foaming wake could be seen, brown and discolored, showing that they were passing over a patch of shallow water. After an anxious moment or two the boat was going as fast as ever, and Ware breathed sighs of relief until, luck again sulky, the Bôto jarred with a distinct bump, the engine slowed and by the sound of the exhaust indicated that a severe strain was being put upon it. It was obvious that the water had shoaled until the propeller was working in the mud.

There was, however, nothing to do but to attempt to push on. Ware eased the clutch, let the engine speed up, and then clutched up again. The Bôto jerked forward a few yards before the engine slowed once more. Then he put the engine into neutral again, sent Margarita forward to sound with the boathook, and when she reported about two feet of water he called out to her to look out for the bump, threw the clutch in, and had the satisfaction of feeling the boat bounce forward another ten yards or so. Another sounding showed a little more water and with yet another jerk the Bôto cleared the shoal and raced on her way.

"I'm afraid that hasn't done her any good," Ware remarked, listening to the sharp vibration and knocking that told of something strained or loosened. At that moment, just as they were about to enter a blue palm-fringed opening edged with tall wild cane, a small canoe shot forward to meet them, and Vicente cried a greeting. He

climbed aboard the Bôto and they went on, towing the montaria, a bark canoe so narrow that the sides touched his body when he sat in it; in that order they quickly traversed the cane-fringed igarapé. As they approached the Amazon the character of both water and vegetation began to change; the trees were more varied, with a wealth of undergrowth and shrubs and palms: the water lost its dark clear stain and showed a muddy floor when disturbed to any depth. Half a mile farther and the winding water lane, intersected as many others had been by other channels that opened out in a network, finally broadened into a palm-edged lake on whose southern border stood a thatched hut, topping a steep and sandy bank.

In front of the dwelling, which was little more than a shed, but sweet and clean and backed by garden patches of mandioca and cacao, lay the igarité, a deep and strong canoe some twenty-five feet long by about five feet broad; a rounded cover, the toldo, thatched with leaves and bound with lianes, occupied about a third of the boat's length, nearly filling the space between the mast and the stern. The chief opening, facing the middle of the boat, was half covered with a bark screen, and there was another small opening at the back from which a fixed paddle was operated as a rudder.

All Rafael's family came down to the water's edge: a couple of thickset, sturdy youths, wearing nothing but cotton trousers rolled up above the knee; Rafael's Indian wife, rather good looking, with a broad smile, sleepy eyes, and tattooed cheeks; and four naked little children. They offered the visitors little painted cuias full of cachaça; palm fruit of the forest, and bowls of

mingao, a rather distasteful paste made with maize and water.

Vicente drank three or four of the little cups of strong liquor without turning a hair, his placid face, like smooth pale wood, never changing, and quickly transferred bundles and cases from the Bôto to the igarité, adding a little more farinha, dried piraracú and coffee. Rafael's wife solemnly brought and tied to the igarité's prow a root of some forest plant—Jacuman, for luck.

"I want you to sit under the shelter of the toldo," Ware told his lady passenger. "The sun is frightfully hot in the open, and then it's just as well that you shouldn't be seen . . . at least, I don't want anyone to look at you but me—this is pure jealousy, you understand, Margarita. And if you laugh at me like that I shall kiss you in front of all these city fathers and there will be a scandal on the Amazon—and besides, it's my decent duty not to think about things like that until we get to Pará, isn't it?"

Margarita meekly withdrew to the toldo, John went forward to the Bôto, now fastened to the igarité, while Rafael and Vicente, long paddles in their hands, stood up on the front of the igarité, now made fast to the motor boat.

John called out to Margarita as he started the engine: "Any minute after we get into the main stream we may meet some inquisitive person, and if that happens I may cut the tow rope and ignore you. Don't be frightened if you find yourselves adrift." Frightened! Margarita laughed. Now she was neighbor to water and trees she couldn't be frightened any more . . . only city pavements and people were things of terror.

Waving farewells to the assembled family on

the lakeside, they started at a fair pace, the Bôto vibrating harshly but doing her work. Traversing the final stretch of waterway between the Negro and the Amazon, they saw the character of the forest changing yet more decisively. Masses of *caña brava* stood waving little green flags, lighter foliage appeared, floating water plants and wild bananas and lilies grew thickly at the muddy sides, and the plumed heads of palms bent forward from the forest tangle. As the sun dropped the woods awoke and scores of clear, ringing bird voices began to call from the upper branches. As they came out at last into the immense and sun-drenched Amazon, a mighty golden sweeping flood rushing past the tiny water lane with its impetuous torrent laden with trophies of its power, it was a different world from that of the sombre forests of the black water.

On the shallow bank at the point where they emerged, a crowd of white wading birds were stalking; the vicious mottled heads of alligators, their long mouths opened showing the cruel teeth and red inner skin, lay in rows on the shelving edge, half in the water, their tiny eyes unmoving. A flock of bright green parrots flew, two by two, screaming and scolding with a clatter of raucous tongues, across the river. Ware, turning the nose of the Bôto downstream, called to Margarita: "We are going to make our way across, working between those islands—that one's *Paciencia*. Then we can keep out of the way of the river steamers. . . . That isn't the bank you see over there: that's all islands."

Margarita crawled forward and called to him: "Are we going to stay in the river?"

"No! No, I think we can make the channels on

the south without losing any time. Do go back to the toldo, Margarita! And take one of the short paddles just in case of accidents. The current's awfully strong."

Once fairly caught in the fierce Amazonian rush, the Bôto doubled her speed; slowed down by the *igarité*, she had made little more than eight knots since they left Rafael's lake, and now, carried along in a smooth sweep, the two boats danced and rocked. Ware took the churning water at a slight angle trying to avoid the central uproar; they were mercilessly tossed and shaken, but eventually reached the shelter of an opening between two thickly wooded islands, running into a narrow channel a mile long, overhung with bright flowering lianes, full of singing birds. Emerging from this water path, they negotiated another racing muddy stretch, borne downwards by the pressure of the current so far that, at last arrived in the calmer waters close to the right bank, they found that they had been carried past the opening for which they had steered, and were obliged to turn and creep back, hugging the shore beneath the protection of the spreading trees.

Entering the Autas-Miry channel, decked with feathery little palms, green as English grass, they traversed it with caution until it opened out into a clear blue lake; here the Bôto was put to top speed until the water narrowed again, but as the water was still of considerable width they were able to make nine or ten knots with the current without danger, in spite of the long twists of the channel networks. They encountered a couple of slim *montarias*, paddled by Indians with harpoons; here and there a tiny thatched hut stood off in a nook by the water, sometimes backed by

a dense array of pale-stemmed cacao trees, hung with red pods; but when night fell they had not met more than five or six people.

With darkness, they tied up to a convenient trunk on the water's edge and got out of the boats to stretch cramped limbs. Ware and the two caboclos made a fire, cooked food, and made coffee. Margarita, still very tired, lay in the hammock that they hung for her near the fire after the meal, and slept soundly until the moon rose and they decided to go on again. When Ware helped her from the hammock she stood for a moment looking at the velvet dark forest with a moon sailing overhead so bright that it turned the water to a silver ribbon threading through the marshalled trees, thinking with a pang of the moon above Manáos on the previous night. As they went on again they had to slow the Bôto's speed, for the water lanes narrowed and twisted and ran into other floods and little creeks, and often the great forest giants closed overhead and shrouded the face of the stream.

The night was very clear. No rain had fallen all day, and there were no clouds but a few light wisps that trailed across the moon. The stars seemed to be in enormous quantity, set in sparkling masses in the living sky, and all this transparent array of lights emphasized the brooding dark of the forest, the black tangle of undergrowth and vines.

No one unacquainted with these intricate channels could have guessed the right direction to take among the forest and water network; but Vicente, the steering wheel in his hands, sat beside Ware and guided the Bôto without hesitation or comment, his face impassive. They turned and

twisted, passed the shoulders of long islands or peninsulas, skirted the borders of wide lagoons. At the sight of one long tree-covered stretch of land, Ware called out to Margarita that this was the Ilha da Trindade, and the girl, waking from a doze through which she still heard the swish of the water and of the plants that brushed the boat's side, presently heard him say that a dark line on their left must be the Ilha Grande de Serpa.

"Are you awake, Margarita?" Half sitting at the entrance to her shelter, propped up on the Bôto's blue cushions, she waved a hand to him: "How much have we done?"

"About a hundred miles. Not so bad!" He called to Rafael, shut off the engine, ran the Bôto close alongside the near bank where a few inches of sand showed above the current, jumped ashore, and, climbing into the igarité, as the motor started again, sat down on one of the thwarts and said with a smile:

"By Jove, if you are going to stay awake, young woman, I am coming and talk to you for ten minutes. I will go away as soon as you are tired, but I had to come. You were so far off, I couldn't see whether you looked happy or not. Let me see your face, Margarita!"

Without answering, she turned her head up to the moon, remaining silent, the light full upon her until John whispered: "Look at me! I am afraid of you when you look at the moon! You are too beautiful, and you seem to be a creature not quite real. I used to think you were a wood fairy, Margarita . . ."

At that she laughed, and held out her hand to him: "Indeed I am real, but a little cold. Isn't it

nearly morning? An hour yet? Let's see the sun rise, John. You shouldn't go away and leave me for such a long time when there are wonderful things to look at."

"Oh, Margarita!" he said, pressing her little hands to his face, "as if you don't know that I am doing my very best to be discreet—after we get to Pará I won't leave you for a single minute all the rest of my life. . . . There's a rug under the cushions there; let me wrap you up in it." He put the rug over her shoulders, sat by her side, lit a cigar of native tobacco, the perfumed tobacco of the upper rivers, and with her hand in his retook the comradeship of the moors. It seemed to both that in those moments of moonlit quiet before the dawn, with the *Bôto* chugging ahead, the rills of racing water beside them, and the dark leaning forest on their right, all the weight of nervous excitement slipped away like a dropped cloak.

Here was respite, an hour's peace; they did not even try or wish to touch the tremulous happiness that fluttered before their hands, thinking of it no more than of the cast fever of *Manáos*. This hour was one in which they came back without effort to the ready friendship of the first days.

As they sat, silent in long spaces, now and then speaking idly of the boat, the water, of the good *Vicente* and *Rafael* whose voices came in gusts from the *Bôto*, the memory of *Luisinha* suddenly came to the girl. She had completely forgotten that affair, and as she recalled it now she was filled with astonishment that it had ever seemed important. She said to herself now, calmly, that it didn't matter if it was true; she was sure it didn't matter. It was a past thing, past before she had ever known *John Ware*; he loved her and

she loved him, and he was not a man ever to have done a thing that was a reproach. In that mood she said to him: "Luisinha—won't she be frightened, alone in the seringal by herself? Suppose the Souzas go there and question and annoy her?"

"Alone? Where?" His voice was puzzled.

"In your seringal." He turned a blank face to her. "Why, my heart, Luisinha doesn't live in the seringal. It wouldn't be good for the kiddies. She always stays in Manáos, in a little house Vicente's got on the Flores bond line; an old aunt lives with her and helps take care of the children."

Astonished, Margarita looked at him in silence.

"Did you ever notice how fair that eldest child of hers is, the little girl? The poor Luisinha has had a history that is almost tragic. Her face tells you that, doesn't it?"

Margarita murmured something inarticulate; Ware went on in a low voice:

"I'll tell you about it; I don't want Vicente to hear me, he's such a good chap, and he was awfully cut up; these Indian-blood people seem so stolid, but they are extraordinarily tender-hearted. He and Luisinha are both natives of Ceará, people of the drought country; they were near neighbors, grew up together, always in love . . . I don't believe Vicente ever has loved or could love or even look at another woman; he has a genuine passion for her.

"He was one of a big family, and when he was nineteen or so and wanted to marry Luisinha, neither of them had a penny, and he came to the Amazon as the quickest way of making some money. His elder brother Rafael was already here,

married to the Indian woman you saw at the little lake. That was four years ago, and I was lucky enough to run across him at that time, when I was fresh to the Amazon too. He is a splendid fellow: he can do anything on earth, is as strong as a horse, and absolutely devoted; he stayed with me two years, saving his money all the time and counting the days until he could go back and fetch Luisinha. When I left the Amazon to take a holiday at home, he came down the river with me to Pará, promising to be there again in four months' time when I returned. But he wasn't, and I could hear nothing of him, and concluded that something must have happened to him. I never saw him again or knew the rest of the story until you chanced to notice him on board the *Pomba* coming up the river."

He glanced forward at Vicente's face, impassive at the wheel.

"While he had been away upriver, Luisinha's father and mother both died and she had been taken into the house of a relative in Ceará. Somehow or other she had fallen into the hands of an unscrupulous brute of a cousin. Rather a fool too, I should think. It always seems to me such mad folly to treat a woman badly. Of course I don't know all the circumstances, but anyhow, there she was, unmarried, with a baby girl at her skirts. She was almost dying of wretchedness when Vicente returned from the Amazon, but they seem to have gone straight into each other's arms. He married her at once, nursed her until she was well, and then the cousin came back to the village and had a row with Vicente, and Vicente killed him."

"Oh——! But how did he manage—not to be punished?"

"Brazil's unwritten law. These 'crimes of passion' are generally excused, if they're excusable. Vicente had a few months in jail, after a delayed trial, and then somebody got him a pardon. By this time they had a new baby of their own, and decided to come to Manáos. I think the pardon was quite right. I have been long enough in countries where women can't take care of themselves very well to agree with that unwritten law. . . . Look, my sweet, there's the first finger of dawn."

The girl stood up, looking away from him to the eastern sky, suffused with clear rose above the indigo line of forest. She was ashamed, and thought wildly for a minute of telling John the thing she had believed for a number of days, closing her lips upon speech as she realized the mortal indignity she had contemplated. She put out a timid hand to his shoulder, felt herself caught to his heart, and with her face buried vowed that he should never know. When he kissed her she gave back to him the kiss of a woman in love. Beyond his shoulder she saw new dawn: the sheet of rose blushed upwards, turned the far height to amethyst. All the verdure of the forest and the rippling line of the water as they passed took on deep and brilliant colors.

"I am sleepy, John," said Margarita in a child's voice. She lay and slept while he watched the coming of the blazing day,

XXI.

WHEN she awoke she saw that the Bôto and her convoy lay in a little creek shut in by tiny cliffs of the red tabatinga clay, streaked rosy and tawny; light verdure, like that of a sunny wood in any temperate zone, crowned the cliff, and the mauve spikes of water hyacinth glistened in the bright air, dancing on the water. A dozen yards away rose the smoke of a fire, where Rafael and Vicente negotiated the cooking pots; the scent of coffee drifted along the creek. She stepped out of the *igarité* on to the narrow strip of shore, and met Ware descending; she borrowed a comb from him, climbed upon the bank to look about her, and, finding a rivulet that made a miniature fall over the little cliff, bathed her face and hands and arranged her scant clothes as well as she could.

"What a test of love!" she said, looking at her reflection in the water. "To travel for three days in a black mantilla and a camisole and a torn blue cotton skirt! At least he'll have no illusions about me." But when, coming back to the camp, she looked closely at John, she saw that he too was dressed for the Amazon. He wore a native straw hat, a collarless cotton shirt tucked into a pair of old blue trousers, and wore *alpargatas* on his feet. He apologized humbly: "One doesn't want to be conspicuous . . . but I am rather ashamed to escort you, dearest, for you are so beautiful." She squeezed his arm boldly. They

sat cross-legged on the ground and ate their black beans and bits of stewed fish with the hunger of the outdoor campaigner. As they drank the last drops of coffee he asked her if she knew where she was. Oh, no!

"Very well! We crossed the Amazon to the left bank while you were still fast asleep, Margarita. We are well past Serpa, I don't know just how far, and headed for Obidos." She interrupted him giggling:

"I could go and hunt for father's stone turtle there, couldn't I?"

"I'm afraid you must wait till we elope the next time, Margarita. Now, the question is whether we should stick to the Amazon henceforth, or whether we should enter the chain of water paths on the north. There is a wonderful row of lakes and backwaters all the way to Obidos. But this region is out of my beat, and the boys don't know it at all. We might waste a lot of time trying to find the way."

Taking Vicente into consultation, he decided to hug the left bank of the river, keeping well under the shelter of the forest and avoiding the treacherous head wind as much as they could. Emerging from the creek into the Amazon, a golden and dazzling flood, they got up speed quickly and made fourteen or fifteen knots with the help of the current. Rafael and Vicente ran the Bôto, while Ware stood in the prow of the big canoe armed with a long stout paddle, on the lookout for snags. But such floating trees and branches as there were rolled in the angry central race, and fortune kept safe the little craft.

They sped past miles of cacao plantations, with long low houses perched on the bank, open to the

sun and all eyes; ran past inlets and tiny farms; then again found themselves running in deep shadow as great trees overhung the water and swung a screen of creepers far out. In the open reaches an insufferable heat beat down when the head wind dropped.

Along a stretch of clear water, Ware came and sat beside the girl at the door of her little shelter, spreading his map before her.

"At Serpa we had made nearly a hundred and twenty miles. Now, going at this clip, with a strong current and no wind against us, we must be doing twenty knots, although we're towing. But we've still got something like seven hundred miles to make before we get to Pará."

"It does sound a long way," she agreed seriously, and he laughed.

"You darling child, this is quite a long river—compared to the Sansoe. We shall pass Villa Bella at midday, with luck—another hundred miles. Then Obidos, nearly a hundred more, before sundown, even if we stop an hour to get some food. Are you hungry, Margarita?"

"No. It's too hot for beans and farinha."

"Ah, didn't I tell you the tropics was no place for food? There's too much climate and not enough weather. I am sure you need really abominable weather to enjoy food. . . . The Café Royal and a cold London drizzle outside and a grilled sole. . . . Margarita, do you realize that if I am right about my rubber process, we shall be able to afford a grilled sole now and again when we're married? I don't see why I shouldn't say that, in spite of all my vows, considering we may get to Santarem to-night, and that's halfway to Pará. . . ." She laughed at this, and he guided

her finger to the Tapajos. "If we were a steamer, we could get to Pará from Santarem in twenty-four hours. Are you tired of our river, Margarita sweet?"

"I won't tell you. You laughed at my little Sansoe just now." She smiled, but went on almost anxiously: "John Ware, do you know that I love my moors and little brooks? Very much indeed. I shall never love anything else quite so much. Do you mind? Do you think you will mind?"

He dropped his map and took both her hands.

"Heart of me, I don't mind how many things or how many people you love if you'll keep a nest in your soul for me, always let my invisible hand stay in yours even when you are with others, and come back to me at the end of the day."

She looked back deep into his eyes and said after a moment in a whisper, "I think, I think we should both always come back to our house of faëry." She had not yet said a word of her sight of it from the crest above Manáos, but now began to tell him. "I saw it, among the forest, ever so far away and just as plainly, with the smoke from the chimney and the flowers in the little garden and the stepping-stones . . . when I was running away from Manáos that night. It seems so long ago. When I reached the forest edge I was afraid I could never find you, but I saw the house of faëry and then I knew I should."

"You saw it? Oh, my little love! Tell me, tell me!" He was greatly moved, and listened to her intently as she tried to explain. "It was among the trees. I stood on the ridge and looked into the forest up the black river—where I thought the black river must run. I could smell the flowers.

The white wall was quite plain in the sunshine. It was beautiful to see it. I didn't mind anything then."

"Oh, Margarita!" He pressed her hands to his eyes, and presently asked her, "Did you know you belonged there?"

"Yes, yes, of course. I knew you belonged there too," she smiled.

"You *are* mine, you know," he said. "As I am yours."

"Yes, of course," she replied again, quite simply.

"I know you are a wood sprite and that I shall never be quite sure I have you . . . but if you'll do what you said just now, and always come back to our house of faëry . . ."

Vicente's shout interrupted him, and he jumped to the prow, picking up the paddle, in time to save the canoe from more than a bruising jar against a heavy tree trunk wedged among weeds.

With the cessation of the breeze the sky gradually became overcast and the air grew heavy. Fearful lest the threatened rain should presently make it impossible to build a fire, they made fast under a huge silk-cotton tree, hurriedly prepared food and coffee, and finished a scrambled meal just as the steady downpour began. Sheets of gray water fell vertically, dimpling the yellow river, veiling the leaden sky.

As the Bôto started again they ran into sullen water that rolled in long lines; the forest slowly retreated, and the distant shore disappeared altogether from sight. A couple of steamers that passed, churning their way upriver, sending snarling waves against the two small boats,

seemed monstrous seen through the wet shroud. The Amazon was nothing but a neutral-tinted desert, desolate, hopeless, limitless.

Margarita, sitting cross-legged under the toldo wrapped in a waterproof cape of Ware's, remained dry, but the three men were soaked through in a few minutes. The heavy downpour did not seem to retard the *Bôto*; she ploughed along gallantly, but Ware listened to a continuous sullen vibration with increasing anxiety. He concluded that something was seriously wrong, and, since repairs were out of the question, the best thing to do was to get the last possible mile out of her. He stayed at the wheel with Vicente, and they pushed the motor as much as they dared in the veil of rain. They passed Villa Bella, invisible. Later, when the sun came out brilliantly, drying their thin clothes in a few minutes, they considered putting into Obidos to get petrol. But, with the knocking sound getting rather worse, they decided against that visit, pushed on past the white walls of the riverside city with its shipping lying before it, giving the wide mouth of the Trombetas a clear berth. There was a light wind behind them now, and, taking a chance for once, they steered into the central current and got all the help possible from the race. Their speed reduced the possibility of an accident from an ugly snag.

They ran in this way until nearly sundown, when the cliffs of Santarem, with the city spread at its feet, came into sight on the southern shore. Here they decided to make a cautious landing, and as the sky turned burning red and blazed in the golden water of the Amazon, Ware steered the *Bôto* into the black water of the Tapajos. Its

strange flood did not mingle with the Amazon, but flowed beside it, gradually streaking out, and in the sunset its dark ripples were tipped with fire like a string of garnets. Night had fallen, still and heavy, before they made a landing below the town, and it was not until they had fortified their courage with black coffee that Ware and Margarita dared to creep through the sleepy by-ways into the outskirts of the town. For they had made up their minds that Santarem must furnish the lady's traveling clothes henceforth, for a comparatively respectable entry into Pará. A cheerful little shop in a straggling side street furnished her with a pair of high-heeled French shoes and white cotton stockings. A stealthy search revealed not a single store open where anything like a decent dress could be bought, but an obliging senhora found sitting in a doorway answered their appeal by rising to the occasion herself and selling Margarita a white muslin blouse with too much lace on it. A hat, now! That proved to be the real stumbling-block. By daylight, in the really noble shops, of course, one might have found something, even halfway up the Amazon . . . but after dark, in the side streets. . . . They compromised by buying a big native straw, and came to the conclusion that they would have to enter Pará when it was dark.

Returning to the boats, they decided that it was not wise to try to run the Bôto in the darkness of the early night, although Vicente volunteered to do his best with her: Neither he nor Rafael ever seemed to want more than four hours' sleep in each twenty-four. They would wait for the moon, resting until she rose. But the skies remained heavy and overcast, although no more

rain fell, and it was not until the first streak of dawn lit the east above the forest that Ware thought it well to try to push on.

The Bôto was by this time running with a distressing noise and making a considerable amount of water aft, although keeping up a fair speed. It was clear that this state of things could not last long, and after they had been traveling for an hour Ware was not unduly surprised when the engine began to race, the vibration ceased, and the Bôto gradually slowed down and stopped. Switching off the engine he leaned over the stern, but could neither see through the muddy water nor reach far enough under the overhanging stern to find out just what was wrong. With Vicente's help he paddled her to the bank, casting off the *igarité* and leaving her in Rafael's care, and then slipping over the side he felt cautiously for the propeller shaft but found nothing there. Examining farther, he was confirmed in his fears that the shaft had broken just outside the stern tube, and that the broken part, propeller, and bracket were all missing.

"She's done for, this trip. We shall have to leave her," Ware called to Margarita. They found a tiny water opening a hundred yards farther on, paddled the Bôto towards it and pushed her in, wedging her sides into the stiff clay and concealing her with the thick bushes that grew down to the margin. All her portable fittings were quickly transferred to the *igarité*, and then, hoisting the blue-dyed sail, they abandoned the Bôto and set out on the last half of the journey. There was a light breeze blowing from the northwest, and with Rafael and Vicente attendant upon the sail while Ware operated a long paddle and

Margarita steered with the fixed blade at the back, they skimmed along beside the right bank without feeling too humble, even when a big English steamer from Iquitos bore down the middle of the river and nearly washed them into the thorny bushes. When they became hungry enough to think about breakfast, it was in vain that they searched for a landing place until at length they came upon a little red-clay eminence with an ambitiously built wooden house standing on it. "*Lenha*," painted upon a big signboard, told the little passing river steamers that they could buy wood for fuel here.

Tied up to the posts in front of the house was, indeed, one of these small craft, of the kind "guaranteed to sail on a heavy dew" that run up a hundred of the Amazonian water byways, fetching and carrying and doing all the odd jobs of the tremendous riverine areas that the big steamers disdain and the trading canoes leave undone. This little *gaiola* was now returning to Pará with an assortment of forestal drugs, a few bags of cacao, some caucho rubber, a stack of dried fish, and a precious load of *castanha*—"Brazil"—and the big sweet *sapucaia* nuts.

The captain, a big stout half Indian with eyes that twinkled and disappeared in his broad fat cheeks when he laughed, hailed the *igarité* pleasantly, offering them help in tying up, and sending a negro boy to them with a pan of live charcoal to forward the preparation of *almoço*. He was going on in half an hour: did they want a tow? He urged this kindness with the ready comradeship of the river. And could they lend him some sugar? They could and did, but after a hurried consultation decided not to accept the tow. The

gaiola was sure to take the middle of the river, and this was an impetuous-running part of the Amazon. They were doing very well by themselves, with the breeze in their bright blue sail.

When they went on they were able to run almost in shadow, close to the right bank where high arching trees spread well over the water, hanging a curtain of flowering vines between the sheltered water path and the blaze of the open river. The water looked smooth, but ran with immense power, singing against the sturdy dark-green water plants. They were so close to the forest that once Margarita, sitting against the corner of the toldo, could almost have stretched out her hand and touched the bizarre painted body of a big toucan that sat on a low branch, his enormous rainbow-colored bill half open as if with astonishment.

With constant good luck in the matter of wind, they traveled fast all the rest of that day, taking turns to steer and sail the steady little craft; there was no other stop, for Margarita heated tins of soup over the pan of charcoal, and they poured mandioca flour into their bowls and ate contentedly. When night fell they were running past sheer forest walls with no sign of an opening. With dropped wind, a straight-falling drizzling rain, and the sail useless, they were using three paddles constantly, each of the four taking a rest in turn. The disappearance of the sun heralded the closing in of complete blackness, in which they precariously crept along, burning a torch in order to keep clear of tangling bushes and to seek a landing place.

About half an hour after nightfall, a light suddenly twinkled in front, and they almost ran into

the posts of a palm-thatched hut that stood in the water. They hailed the dwellers with a blessing, intending to ask only for permission to tie up to the family canoe-hitching post. But when a dark, frail woman with a baby on her hip came to the shutter space and saw the big canoe, she at once courteously invited the travelers into her house. Her husband and son were away, she said, and she would be glad of the company of *gente decente*; she smiled at Margarita, and accepted a present of coffee with grace.

Her house was built on a simple plan; half was completely sheltered, and was hung with a couple of cotton hammocks; the rest was screened only on two sides, and here a string hammock was suspended. The family stores hung from the roof, there were a couple of stools, a few half gourds, a painted tin box, the portrait of a saint with a candle in front of it; hardly anything more. But the manners of the hostess would have honored any palace. She helped the visitors to prepare their supper and offered Margarita her own hammock in the interior room. But the girl could not endure the oppressive inner air and elected to sleep in the outside hammock, while the three men went back to the *igarité*.

All night the girl lay across the hammock, hearing the soft passing of the river under the hut, the stealthy movements of the forest behind her, black, close-ranked, and secret, and from time to time the strange wild cry of some hidden creature. She slept little, tormented by the mosquitoes and the tiny, more maddening flies that sang over her head and bit remorselessly at her uncovered neck and hands and feet.

Next morning, it seemed as if luck had turned

against them. The air was stifling, with not the ghost of a breeze, and with the full dawn a steady screen of rain began to fall. Margarita was sitting on the edge of the veranda, bathing her swollen and fevered ankles when Ware came out from the toldo. "My poor little dear!" he said, looking upon her with distress, and at once went back, grouped among his packages, and emerged with a tiny bottle of oil that he smeared over the bites. Margarita thought the smell of the oil rather worse than the stinging bites, but held her tongue.

When they had drunk coffee they started again after many courtesies, with all three now paddling while the girl steered. A head wind lashed the rain and river against them, and they made slow progress. They worked doggedly, soaked to the skin, until about ten o'clock the rain ceased suddenly and a bright sun came out. The river was like a steam bath for a little while, and presently all the world smiled, trees and river shining. An hour later, they rounded a bend and came upon the gaiola, engaged as before in taking on wood for her fires. The captain, greeting them like bosom friends restored, roared at the immense joke of a canoe overtaking his steamer: but he had spent the night with his padrinho, at this station. Would they have a tow now?

They would, when Margarita threw her vote in its favor, and thence sped onward at a respectable speed in the wake of the stocky little trader. Ware and the caboclos took it in turn to sit at the prow, paddle in hand, to try to avert any possible trouble with floating débris, but the light *igarité*, although threatened more than once

with islands of weeds and branches, pushed them aside or danced over them without injury.

The river remained hazy, with a rather subdued sun that set in an orange glow, but there was no more rain. About noon the little steamer stopped to deliver a bolt of red cotton cloth at a tiny village, and courteously invited Ware's party on board for lunch. When the meal was over he drew Ware aside and suggested that the lady, at whom he had looked with a kind of admiring pity, should come aboard the *gaiola*. . . . He had little accommodation, but the boat's resources were at her disposition . . . it was plain that the lady was not accustomed to live in canoes . . .

Ware thanked him, repeated the offer, and found it coldly received. Not now at least! He must let her go back to the *igarité* till nightfall. She took up her post at the steering paddle with a professional air. The long afternoon passed without incident; the canoe swayed and flew behind the snorting little steamer, with lines of perpetual green forest in an unending vista. The *caboclos* sang softly as they sat forward, their eyes on the river and heavy sticks in their hands, ready for accidents, with Ware at the prow. At sundown the captain stopped for another call, taking on a few balls of rubber and buying a dozen bunches of green bananas from a cheerful friend who offered hospitality to all his visitors. They accepted the ceremonial coffee, and Ware managed to buy a chicken, subsequently slain and stewed with a handful of peppers over a blazing camp fire, but Margarita did not want to go into the house. They ate supper on a tiny spit of white

sandy ground with a feathery background of palms.

Here, while the caboclos washed the scant dishes and talked interminably, Ware took the girl's hand and spoke with seriousness.

"My heart, do you know what is the most sensible thing for you to do now? You should, you really must, Margarita, go on board the gaiola. She is a funny little tub, but she is steady and safe, and you can be much more comfortable. She is a palace compared to the canoe—and you have spent three days in this way already. I must not let you suffer these discomforts any longer. There is no need for it."

"I like it," she protested. He took no notice.

"Please, my sweet, let me put you in charge of that very decent old captain. I will send Vicente to look after you too if you like."

She regarded him innocently.

"And what about you, John Ware?"

"It would not be very discreet of me to come with you. Now would it? My precious child, I am giving you the chance, I hope you see, to leave me for a little while. You will never in your life get rid of me altogether. But for your entry into Pará, dear, wouldn't it look better——"

She began to laugh, her head against his sleeve. "You are talking like—like Mrs. Grenville," she said, and, sitting up, began to scold him.

"Why, John Ware, you want to spoil my adventure! Here you are behaving as if I were a silly little creature afraid of her aunts! Evidently you don't know my father! He would be thoroughly ashamed of me if I went and climbed into that steamer. And as to Brooke, he'd never speak to

me again. *I wonder* at you! You don't realize the sort of family I've got."

If Ware smiled to himself, he insisted sternly.

"But, Margarita, the canoe might tip over."

"Well, if it does, what kind of a story should I be able to tell at Sansoe if I wasn't in her when it happened? Don't you know I am going to brag about this all the rest of my life? Anyone would think you wanted to shame me in the eyes of my own friends and relations? No, senhor, you won't have this tale to yourself. Don't you imagine for one minute that I am going on board that steamer without you."

She stopped, and added in a meek little voice, "We are eloping, aren't we? You said so. Don't let's spoil it. John, let me stay with you."

The firelight had flickered low and the warm tropic dark closed about them. The voices of the caboclos seemed to come from a long distance. Ware whispered to her, "Margarita, Margarita, do you know how much I love you?"

She touched his hair with the gesture of the woman, looked at him in the scented dimness with the eternal eyes of the woman who sees man always as a child, the mother eyes of the wise and very tender. She said gently: "The forest is so near us now, this great endless forest, and this great endless river, with so much wide, wide sky above them. It has been so beautiful, so consoling after all that fever and noise of people. All that seems like a strange dream. But the river and the forest, they are real. We can neither of us ever lose or forget this."

He kissed the palms of her hands.

"Perhaps," she said, "we shall have to spend

nearly all the rest of our lives in houses, under roofs."

The captain again decided to spend the night ashore; he was in no hurry. But after a smoke and a few hours' sleep Ware saw the moon rise in so clear a sky that he agreed with Vicente that it was well to take advantage of the favorable breeze and run the canoe on.

He tried not to waken Margarita, asleep under the toldo and screened with mosquito netting to keep away the myriad flies that besieged the boat when it was not in motion. Lulled by the gentle swaying, she slept deep. But with the approach of dawn a stronger wind sprang up, the canoe flew in the strong current, and she waked to see a strange sight.

The forest and sky were still dim, in waning moon and starlight; half the sky was darkened by heavy cloud banks that lay across the eastern sky. But behind them the rising sun, still hidden, sent invisible shafts that touched the water and turned it to burning gold. She stood up and saw a flood of molten light glowing between the dark-lines of the forest; for a long minute the river was a bright wonder, a path of splendor from magic lands. In another few seconds the sun had pierced his way through the clouds, the sky flamed, and the river was again nothing but water. On the north a line of flat-topped blue ridges stood against, took shape, the mountains that marked the approach to Pará.

The isolation of the journey had passed. Henceforth, as they crept eastwards under the marshalled ranks of matted trees, they sailed and paddled in company with the kindly traffic of the river. Their boat was one with the craft of the

river traders, hailed and greeted continually with the freemasonry of the Amazon. Margarita sat back within the shelter of the toldo, a hand upon the steering paddle, while Ware and the caboclos took turns at the sail.

In the Narrows, where the friendly long-legged huts stood in the water, the gaiola passed and saluted them cheerfully. A score of canoes came and went beneath the hanging vines.

Emerging from the channel they entered at last the swollen waters of the Guamá, and found themselves in the track of the busy highway outside Pará. Motor launches scurried past, painted with gay colors, jostling the slender canoes; flat rafts floated lazily, laden with piles of big black rubber balls, sending a strange and persistent smell into the heavy air. Covered craft and narrow dugouts of a score of different shapes and sizes negotiated the river in common with fussy little steamers, all hurrying with their lumps of black gold to the rich and hungry markets. Now, far ahead, rose the raking funnels of a proud transatlantic liner, lying at her moorings as she waited for her rubber cargo.

The runaways clasped hands. The river and the forest lay behind, already vanishing in a haze of gold and green. Before their eyes the roofs of Pará promised the gateway of the broad sea, the world itself.







MAIN CIRCULATION

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